Down by the Claddagh

Peadar O'Dowd

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Down by the Claddagh

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Down by the Claddagh

by

Peadar O'Dowd

K.G.
1993

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This book is dedicated to Michael Griffin of the Old Claddagh who provided so much valuable information for inclusion between these covers.

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The Claddagh Boatman

I am a Claddagh boatman bold,
Quiet humble is my calling,
From morn 'til night,
From dark 'til light,
Round Galway Bay I'm trawling.

I care not for the great man's frown,
I ask not for his favour,
My wants are few,
No debts I've due,
I live by honest labour.

I have one son a gallant boy,
Not stained by spot, nor speckle,
He pulls and hauls
And works the trawls,
And keeps right trim the tackle.

His father trained his son to be,
Hard working, honest, manly,
The sagart says round Galway Bay,
There's none like young Matt Hanley.

I have thank God a girl as good,
Dear Eileen, slight and slender,
She works and mends,
And brightens home
With love that's bright and tender.

When Sunday brings that hour of rest,
That sweet relief from labour,
We crossed the fields in friendly groups,
And gossiped with our neighbours.

We and they, put in the day,
With harmless recreation
Could Erin's sons live their lives
And need no emigration.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to the many persons who assisted me in the compilation of this book. I would like especially to thank Michael Griffin who, over the years, has delved into his vast store of memories of the Old Claddagh and has graciously allowed me to tape-record and consign so many of them to print. As well, I wish to acknowledge further valuable information on the Claddagh supplied by Eileen Cloherty, Mary Julia Browne, Kate Curran, Maureen Cunningham, Paddy Curran, Paddy Cooke and other members of the former village. Residents of the 'New Claddagh' who helped in the compilation of this book include Martin Connolly, Frank Lydon, Bridie Murphy, Michael O'Flaherty, Billy Flaherty, Michael and John O'Toole, Tom Feeney, and Michael Byrne who introduced me to so many more. Others who kindly offered their advice or contributed items of information include John Quinn (Australia), Noel Hehir, Tony Flannery, Des Kenny, Prof. James P. Murray, Paul Walshe, Michael Beatty, Patricia O'Gorman, Paddy Connell, Eamon McDonagh, Michael Geary, Prof. Etienne Rynne, Bill Scanlon, Christy Kelly, Teresa and Brian Madden, Christy Townley, Bernard Finan and many more, including John Joe Duggan who introduced me to the joys of thatching.

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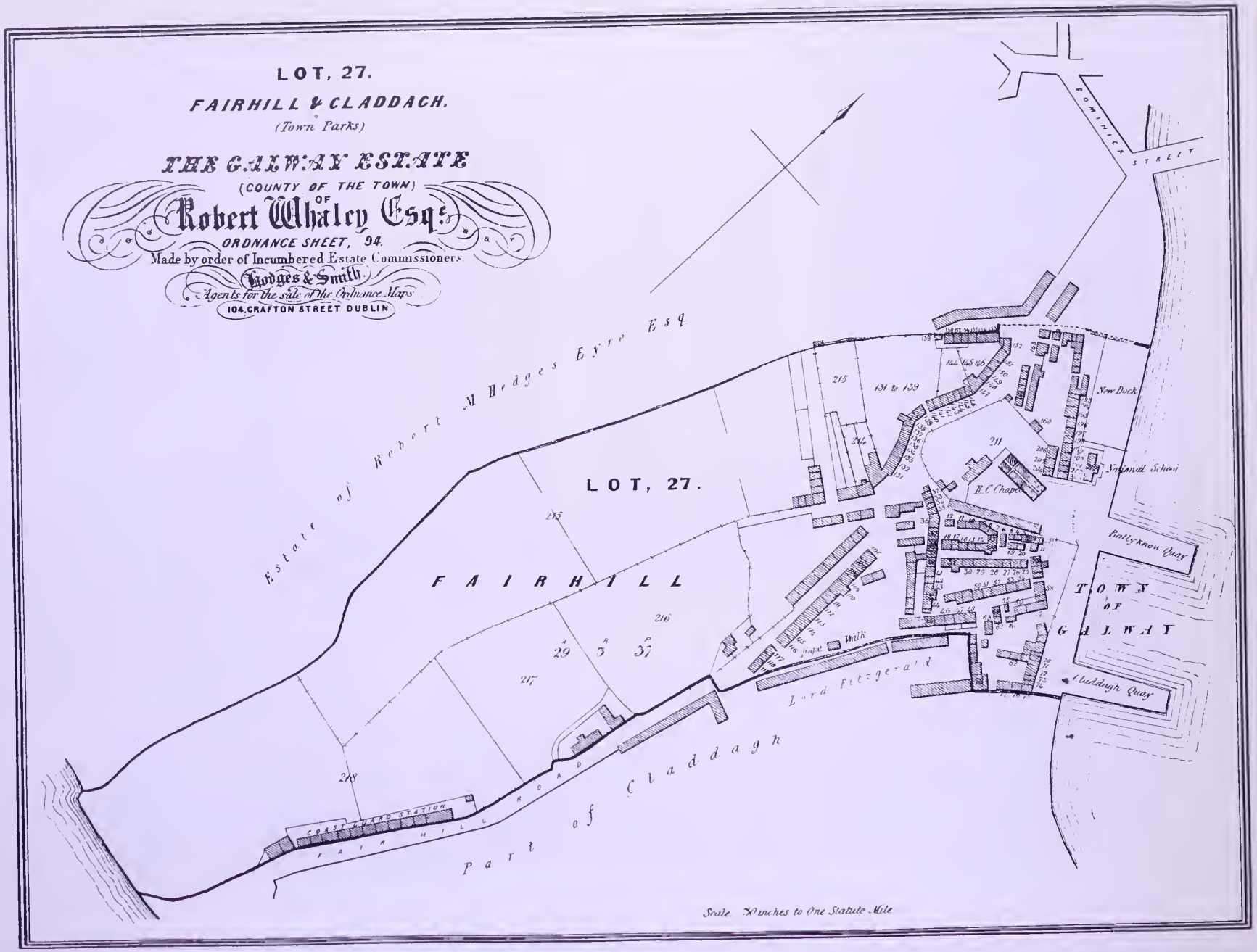
Finally, any errors or omissions are much regretted and will be rectified in future reprints.

Peadar O'Dowd,
RTC Galway
November, 1993.


LOT, 27.
FAIRHILL & CLADDACH.
(Town Parks)
THE GALWAY ESTATE
(COUNTY OF THE TOWN)
OF
Robert Whaley Esq.s
ORDNANCE SHEET, 94.
Made by order of Incumbered Estate Commissioners
Hodges & Smith
Agents for the sale of the Ordnance Maps
104, GRAFTON STREET DUBLIN
DOMINICK STREET
New Dock
National School
R.C. Chapel
Batty's Know Quay
Claddagh Quay
TOWN OF GALWAY
LOT, 27.
FAIRHILL
Estate of Robert M. Hodges Eyre Esq.
Lord Fitzgerald
Part of Claddagh
COAST GUARD STATION
FAIR HILL ROAD
Scale. 30 inches to One Statute Mile

Chapter 1

"The Long Haul of History" — The Story of the Claddagh

The Beginnings

The mists of time have settled gently on the west. Each year is but a droplet falling into the pool of history. The water is quite clear at the surface, but as we peer deeper, darkness floods the past.

History alone cannot tell us when our ancestors first came to the River Corrib. Its estuary, free from the endless canopy of woods, must have been a place of wonder as the river mingled with the sea at a stony place called *An Cladach*, The Claddagh.

Wonder only feeds the mind, however, and hunger made these newcomers search along the shoreline where they made a great discovery. Food grew in profusion upon the rocks as boulders glistened with shellfish and mussel beds climbed high above the mud flats. Flatfish and eels darted wildly in the sand pools while salmon, and mullet frolicked in the currents of the river. Our wild, nomadic, ancestors ceased their wanderings by these ancient Corrib banks.

History is rather mute about these first comers and folklore simply calls them "river folk". Yet, the stone blades they left along the old river shorelines suggest a Stone-Age presence to the archaeologist. Over six thousand years ago, (beyond 4,000 B.C. is as precise as one can get), these Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) people eked out their simple lifes in temporary settlements as they fished and hunted by river banks, long since submerged by rising water levels.

Food was always uppermost in these early minds, and polished stone axe-heads (used to clear the forest floor) found on the river bed at Menlo village, show that Neolithic (New Stone Age) people arrived some time later between 4,000 and 2,000 B.C. These first farmers sowed their seeds and raised their primitive stock by the gentle flowing waters of the River Corrib long before our time. They used log boats to travel along their watery highway, and even left some for us to find in submerged coves.

Clearing woodlands to farm may not have appealed too strongly to those who lived by the estuary, however, as ample food supplies lay in the inner sections of Galway Bay. The shallow waters off Mutton Island became a favourite pasture for these early Claddagh dwellers, where fish instead of grain became the object of the harvest. Log boats could not cope with Atlantic waves, however, and craft made from animal hides were used instead. None of these early currachs have survived.

Other finds from the River Corrib date from the Bronze Age (c. 2,000-400 B.C.), the Iron Age (c. 400 B.C.-400 A.D.) and Early Christian Period (c. 400 B.C.-800 A.D.). Most consist of weapons such as spears and swords, which tell of changing times as Celtic peoples came to establish their *tuatha* or kingdoms in the wild lands of the west. Sounds of their ancient battles still echo in the Irish Annals as Guaire and other Connacht kings fought their wars with Munster counterparts all along the shorelines of Galway Bay.

Farming, as well as milling, filled the gaps between conflicts, and the remains of a horizontal mill on the Clybaun Stream, dating to about 600 A.D., shows that peaceful periods were also part of the past. Later, ringforts or enclosed farmsteads were constructed at Menlo, Dalysfort Road and Ballybane while those at Dangan, *Daingean* (a secure place) and Rahoon, *Rath Ún*, (the fort of Ún) suggest a military purpose.

Times of War and Peace

The Claddagh, however, boasts no finds of weapons or remains of forts. A peaceful community lived here, it seems, destined only to fish and not to fight. Even as holy men came to spread the word of Christ and establish great monastic settlements at nearby Roscam and on Corrib shores, history does not show an Early Christian presence in the Claddagh.

T. A. Mac Raiden, in his Life of Enda, writing in the 14th century, records, however, that the great St. Enda of Aran was presented with fish on the Maree peninsula by a boy who was born in

> *The harbour which directs to the lake named Orbsen.....*

This is the earliest reference to the fishing harbour on the Corrib estuary, which, even in St. Enda's time in the 5th century, may have been a substantial fishing village.

Times change, however, and the Claddagh area felt the glow of war in the 9th century, when, as James Hardiman in his *The History of the Town and County of the Town of Galway* informs us:

> *The Vikings began to pour in swarms from their northern hive upon Ireland .....In the year 835, an army of these adventurers, under the command of their sanguinary leader, Turgesius, over-ran and ravaged the province of Connaught ...*

The following century, in 927, to be precise, the Annals state:

> *The foreigners of Limerick took possession of Lough Orbsen and pillaged its islands.*

Again, the little fishing hamlet at the river mouth felt the wrath of these Irish Vikings, who, rather surprisingly, did not settle on its banks. Thus, an early opportunity of founding Galway was lost.

In 1124, however, the first reference to a settlement at the Corrib estuary occurs when the Annals tell of a fort, *Dún Bun na Gaillimhe* (Fort at the end of the River Galway) being built on the eastern bank. Local tribal names appear now and while the O'Hallorans occupied the estuary area, this great earthen fort was more than likely held by the local O'Flaherty chieftain under the lordship of the O'Connor kings of Connacht.

Although, attacks from Munster clans continued in 1132 and 1149, a fleet of ships of the "Galway *Dún*" still found time to sail off and battle northern foes. In 1161, according the Annals, strange ships appear at the harbour of the Galway *Dún* and the village went on fire! Despite these setbacks, *Baile na Sruthán* (The Town of the Streams), an early name for Galway, became an important focal point. Later, when Norman invaders came, they quickly saw the true potential of this ancient settlement on the Corrib estuary.

The Foundations of Galway

The fort was replaced by a stone castle after the Norman leader, Richard de Burgo, defeated the O'Flahertys in 1235 and banished them across the Corrib. As a foreign settlement gradually became established about the castle, Irish anger made it necessary in 1270 to begin enclosing the site with fortified walls. The great town wall building era began as Galway changed from an insignificant settlement into a town of stone.

It is not known what happened to that portion of the fishing hamlet on the Claddagh shore as the Norman town across the river cast a stony cloak about itself. The accounts of the various murage taxes collected to finance the building of this town wall, suggest, however, that fish supplies may have come from native as well as town sources. The royal charter of 1361 granted the town the right to collect the following customs on saleable commodities coming to the town:

> *....For every measure of herrings for sale, one farthing.*
> *For twenty large fish in ship or boat for sale, one penny.*
> *For every horse load of seafish for sale, one penny.*
> *For every man's load of seafish for sale, one farthing.....*

Even in this early period in Galway's history, fish played a large part in the economy of the growing town and the main seafish market became established in Fishers' Lane market off Back Street (St. Augustine Street today). In recent archaeological excavations at the Jury's Hotel site at Quay Street, nearly half the food bones found in medieval layers were of fish, and large cod, ling, pollack, and haddock were especially prominent. As well, the vast majority of fish bones found in a medieval context from excavations carried out in Athenry Castle, were of ling, cod, whiting and haddock which suggests that the fish may have come from a nearby port, probably Galway.

Rising Importance of the Fishing Industry

As Galway grew to be the third most important seaport in these islands, fish became one of its chief exports. While Claddagh boats delivered fish to the town's quays especially in later times, initially for security reasons, it seems, the town depended mostly on its own fishermen. Typical of the latter, were those employed by Richard Blake who complained in 1557 about the strict rules laid down to control the fishing fleet. Nevertheless, fishermen and their families were deemed a privileged class, and like the mayor and town officials, were served "*before others*" at the town's seven market places. Indeed, a 1585 Corporation by-law even forbade them from using a spade or plough which might "*barr them from fyshinge*"!

The system gradually broke down, however, as 16th century religious strife and 17th century sieges took its toll on town life. By then, as we shall see, the Claddagh had grown in importance and eventually became the largest fishing village in the land.

Growth of The Claddagh

Although Galway became an important port in medieval times, tradition sees the Claddagh evolving into a unique native colony on its doorstep. Even as the village became an important suburb of the town when its Liberties were expanded in 1610, the Claddagh, according to tradition, still retained a special ambience. Its king and customs, its fishing methods and way of life made it a special place, very different to the suburbs of Woodquay and Bohermore in the Eastern Liberties. All it needed was a special heart.

The Coming of the Dominicans

That heart began to beat in 1488 when the Dominicans came from Athenry and started their long association with the Claddagh. The abandoned chapel of the Premonstratensians became their first house there and its old title, "St. Mary on the Hill", lasts down to the present. The new foundation, with endowments from Galway's leading merchants, became an important part of Claddagh and Old Galway life. Because of this, it figured largely in the history of the town.

Initially, things went well for the Claddagh Dominicans and after the suppression of the monasteries, they continued to serve their people as best they could. Even when the Corporation was given the lease of the priory in 1570, one feels there was little interruption in the pastoral work of this great Order.

International affairs soon impinge upon our Claddagh story, however, and when some 300 Spanish Armada survivors were executed at nearby Forthill in 1588, the winds of change chilled Galway hearts. As the new century dawned, the Claddagh clergy were dispersed, and two full decades were to pass before they could safely return. Recovery was complete, however, as the Claddagh became a rather privileged place and its Dominican community increased in numbers to become the largest in the land. Prayer mingled with tranquility just then on the gentle slopes of Fairhill.

In those turbulent times, however, peace never enjoyed too long a tenure, and as parliament fought king, war spread quickly throughout the land. When a Cromwellian force landed in 1642, it found a ready base among the strong stone buildings of St. Mary on the Hill. A welcome landmark to the sailor now became a battery site for Lord Forbes as he bombarded the hated royalists in their town across the Corrib. He failed to reduce Galway, however, and at his departure, a defaced Claddagh church and ruptured priory graves gave a grim warning of darker deeds to come.

There followed an even sadder event, when the Dominicans agreed to the demolition of their church by Galway Corporation so that its sturdy walls would not offer advantage to the enemy again. Even as its stones came tumbling down, however, Cromwellian troops were on the march elsewhere and by 1652 the town surrendered to their commander, Sir Charles Coote. By the end of 1656, Galway and its Liberties, including the Claddagh, was

cleared of all "Irish and other popish inhabitants" as a prelude to plantation by Cromwellian supporters.

This never occured as intended, however, and with the Restoration of King Charles II many of the old inhabitants filtered back. There was joy in the Claddagh also when the Dominicans returned and built a new St. Mary's a little further down the hill. The new building was subsequently described in 1674 as "the best and most ornamented church in the Kingdom" by no less a person than St. Oliver Plunkett. John Kirwan, the first Catholic mayor for thirty years, showed his gratitude by crowning its delightful statue of "Our Lady of Galway" with a silver crown in 1683. There was hope in the native heart again, but as the town edged gently towards its former glory, cannon split the Derry air.

Kings were at war now and as William of Orange chased his father-in-law, James II, across a ravaged land, Galway vied with Limerick to be the last town to fall. The sounds of cannon from the battlefield at Aughrim on the 12th July in 1691 sent shivers through the town defenders, for memories of Forbes and Coote more than lingered in the native heart. Within a week, Galway surrendered and as the 17th century drew to its dismal close, we find the Dominicans banished temporarily yet again from the Claddagh and their flock.

The Claddagh becomes a Suburb

Despite these interruptions, however, the Claddagh had changed from a simple fishing village beyond the edge of Galway's walls. Its isolation began to fade when the town's first bridge, the Great West Bridge (later O'Brien's Bridge), was built by Edmund Lynch in 1442. In 1488, as we have seen, the Dominicans came to its famous hill and established their church and friary. In 1558, Thomas Martin erected a mill on the west side of the bridge (on the site of the present Bridge Mills) and Thomas Phillip's Survey drawing of 1685 shows a line of thatched houses leading from the bridge towards the Claddagh.

In 1613, Nicholas Darcy got permission to hold a 3-day August fair at Fairhill, and in 1664, Mutton Island, off the Claddagh shore, was designated a town commonage. However, the most informative data on the changing Claddagh is to be found in the Pictorial Map of Galway of 1651.

Drawn up to show Galway in its best light, this famous map is not afraid to test the truth. Rows of two-storied slated houses line the Claddagh about the Dominican church, while its little cove seems to act as a repair harbour for two large foreign ships. The smaller fishing craft of the village are not shown, however, as such boats, perhaps, could be seen to ferry troops across to the town in times of siege.

Yet, as the 18th century dawned, the time of siege and war had past and new settlers ruled the town. Much of the parish of Rahoon, including the Claddagh, was part of the Whaley estate, having been granted originally to Col. Whaley, an officer in the Cromwellian army. Severe religious and civil restrictions were introduced by these newcomers and forced the once powerful merchant families to leave. Consequently, Galway's foreign trade declined and the main part of its fishing industry transferred to the Claddagh. In 1762, a new schedule of tolls drawn up by the Corporation precluded any custom being charged on fish supplies coming from the village for public sale. By then, the Claddagh was the main fish supplier to the town and began to control the fishing in the bay.

Growth of The Claddagh Fishing Industry

Now, as we near the surface in this pool of Claddagh history, written facts become the bubbles, which rise to greet us from 18th and 19th century reports. From evidence supplied to the Irish House of Commons in 1762, we learn that Galway Bay contained the finest herring and cod stocks in the kingdom and its fishermen supplied places as far away as Limerick and the Midlands with fish. In season, about 200 boats fished the bay, of which 160 belonged to Galway, and the rest came from the Clare side of the bay.

Four years later, Arthur Young, a famous English traveller of his time, mentioned between 200 and 250 boats operating from Galway, each sturdy craft weighing between 4 to 6 tons. In 1820, when James Hardiman published *The History of Galway*, he noted about 250 fishing boats operating from the Claddagh. Each had increased in size to between 8 and 14 tons and became the Galway Hooker class we know today. As well as fishing, boat building became an important industry within the village. Related activities such as net and sail making, rope and fishing line manufacture, as well as basket and barrel making also grew in importance as the Claddagh became a self-sustained fishing village, proud of its independence and heritage.

Growth of the Population

The population of the Claddagh also steadily increased during the 18th century and by its end, the village had become one of the largest of its type in Ireland. From 528 inhabitants in 1695, the population rose to 2,336 according to Hardiman's interpretation of the 1812 census figures. He goes even further and suggests that the population of the Claddagh reached over 3,000 in 1820 with upwards of 2,500 fishermen, mostly from the Claddagh, being employed in the inner bay alone.

As we peer through the clearing waters near the surface of our pool of history to the start of the 19th century, we can detect a sense of happiness and prosperity in the growing Claddagh village. The Penal Laws, enforced with such vigour elsewhere, had merited only a few small 18th century entries in the account books of the Dominicans. As the new century dawned, we find the good friars busy building a new St. Mary's on the Hill, a church eventually replaced by the present one in 1891. The Claddagh, through the bounty of its fishing and dedication to its church, began to find heart again.

Changes Taking Place

Great changes were also taking place in and about the village itself. Thanks to the improvement in the fishery, the growing population led to an increase in the number of Claddagh homes, which by 1812 numbered 468 with 500 families in occupation. All of the homes were thatched and their interiors noted for their neatness. The streets and walking areas were also tidied up in 1808 under the direction of a Captain Hurdis of the Royal Navy, who prevailed upon the fishermen to use a portion of their earnings to pave their village with cobble stones and install much needed drainage channels.

By now, three main areas were clearly defined in the Claddagh. The heart of the village lay just west of the church and was separated from the priory grounds by Dogfish Lane. A section stretched along the Fairhill Road leading to where fairs were held and eventually to

a coastguard station and battery above the beach. The area just east of the church (where the fire station is today) was known as the *Garry Glas* (Green Garden) and contained the turf market and schools.

The shoreline, however, was to show the greatest changes. Prior to the 19th century, the Claddagh fleet experienced difficulty in rounding Rintinane Point, on the southern tip of the Claddagh shore. Here, wind, tide and river current necessitated the building of a slate (stone) pier by Alexander Nimmo, the famous Scottish engineer, in 1822. Further improvements followed.

The road leading from Nimmo's Pier initially ran along the foreshore of what was later known as "The Swamp", now South Park and joined up with the end of Fairhill road. Shortly, afterwards, the task of filling in the tidal section of "The Swamp" commenced and led eventually to the extension of Nimmo's Pier direct to the Claddagh. Here, stone quays were built during the 1830s, the finance coming from various grants received from the Commissioners of Fisheries. These earlier works, together with the Claddagh Basin, built during the subsequent Eglinton Canal construction scheme, provided the Claddagh with one of the best fishery harbours in the land at the time.

This canal development, which commenced in 1848 and finished in 1852, brought great changes to the physical environment of the Claddagh as well as to the life styles of the villagers. When completed, Lough Corrib was connected to the sea by a navigable canal which allowed sailing craft such as turf boats, to ply their trade between lake and sea. As well, the Claddagh Basin, constructed as a terminal for such traffic, became a safe anchorage for the Claddagh craft during lull periods in the fishing or when storms threatened.

Perhaps the biggest change came, however, when a temporary wooden bridge was built across the river to carry construction materials for the canal and basin. Bridges go both ways, of course, and this one gave direct access to the newly established fish market at the Spanish Arch. Pleas for the bridge's retention were successful and from 1852, the Claddagh Bridge (named Wolfe Tone bridge today), joined the Claddagh village even more closely to the city.

The east bank of the estuary also saw many changes during the 18th and 19th centuries. The old medieval docks, situated upstream of the Spanish Arch, became obsolete and was filled in to become the site of the new fish market. The arch itself was only opened in the middle of the 18th century and allowed access to the new Eyre graving harbour (the mud dock of today) at the end of Long Walk. A quay wall was constructed along the new roadway and became a favourite landing place for many of the Claddagh fishing craft.

These harbour improvements about the Claddagh reflected the rising prosperity and revenue accruing from the sea fishery at its doorstep. The demand for fish was insatiable leading Arthur Young who toured Ireland in 1776 to comment on the enormous catches of the Claddagh fleet, when boats would take up to 5,000 fish in one night. Hardiman noted that:

> *"The annual value of this fishery cannot be well ascertained, but it must amount to a considerable sum, from the multitude of families exclusively and independently supported by it alone".*

Decline of Fishing Industry

Such dependence on a single source of income had its drawbacks, however, and when fish catches began to fall during the 19th century, the Claddagh, as a fishing village gradually went into decline. There were many reasons for this decline of its fishing industry and *Dutton's Statistical Survey of the County of Galway* published in 1824 mentioned mismanagement and lack of capital as being chief among them.

As the 19th century progressed, however, it soon became obvious that other factors helped lead to the demise of this once great fishery. Chief among these were the unwillingness of the Claddagh fishermen to adapt their old fishing methods to changing circumstances or to seek advice from any quarter. Their king, distinctive in his white sailed hooker, enforced the traditional fishing regulations on the bay, and few dared breach rules honed by generations of Claddagh fishermen.

Thus, when fishing stocks became depleted or moved away, the fishermen refused to change their ways. When trawling with bigger boats became a more efficient way of fishing, the Claddagh men persisted with their crude long lines or drift nets. When a trawl boat was introduced into the bay by Lachlan MacLachlan, a Galway-based Scotsman, it needed navy protection from the irate Claddagh men. To them, trawling disturbed the fish and decimated stocks.

For their part, the trawler men and fishermen from other centres resented the Claddagh community's claim to control fishing in the bay. As a result, various fishery enquiries were held during the 19th century with the aim of trying to resolve the various problems peculiar to Galway Bay.

The reports from these enquiries show a gradual decrease both in the number of boats operating and the personnel involved in the Claddagh fishing industry. By 1836, the number of sailing craft had dropped to 140. Conversely, the number of trawlers increased and by May 1897, the *Galway Vindicator* reported up to 33 trawlers operating in the bay despite the many efforts of the Claddagh fishermen to stop them.

Decline of the Village

The Claddagh village also declined as the 19th century progressed. The number of occupied houses slumped from the 500 noted in the 1812 census. By the time *Griffith's Valuation* was published in 1855, Fairhill Road had 133 houses and 10 ruins, while the rest of the Claddagh contained 329 thatched homes of which 45 were already derelict.

The Great Famine of 1845-49 was also partially responsible for the general decline in the fortunes of the fishing village. In 1846, according to the "Claddagh Cemetery Book" chapter in the book, *The Dominicans in Galway* 1241-1991 (published in 1992 and edited by Eustás O Héideáin O.P.) fifty-eight people were buried in the little graveyard beside the church, a figure which sadly rose to two hundred and fifty-eight in 1847. Although the number buried fell to seventy-three in 1848, the records of 1849 make the saddest reading of all. The dreadful word "Cholera" filled the pages then, and while the names of adults are duly recorded, the number of children buried daily is simply noted.

Dark, then, were those days of decline for the Claddagh community when little official

help came from town or government. The Whaleys, and later the Dalys of Dunsandle, on whose estate the Claddagh lay, never financed their tenants to harvest the sea.

Offered Help

The Dominicans, deeply conscious of the fading fortunes of the Claddagh community, offered to help. Fr. Patrick Hughes, Prior, tried in 1833 to show the benefits of trawling to the fishermen, but without success. His fellow Dominicans next sought to educate the young in modern fishing techniques. When the famous Claddagh Piscatorial School opened beside the church in 1846, hopes were high, indeed, that various technical aspects of the fishing industry would become a special part of the school's curriculum. There were even hopes of having a model training vessel erected on grounds beside the school to give direct "hands on" training. However, the expectations of Fr. Hughes and later, Fr. Rushe, were never fully realised and the school became an ordinary national school in time.

The strangest source of help, however, came from distant English Quakers. In conjunction with the Dominicans, they set up a Galway based relief committee to help the Claddagh fishing community. However, proposals regarding fish curing, redeeming nets, acquiring proper salt stocks, and providing a suitable vessel to ferry fish ashore all went unheeded. Even the possibility of bringing fishermen from England to give instructions in modern fishing techniques, foundered on the fishermen's refusal to change.

Decline Continues

As time went by, however, these same fishermen rued the chances they had spurned to improve their industry. By 1854, *The London and West of Ireland Fishing Company* was formed with Galway as its base. Trawlers, up to 80 tons, were soon at work, and without capital to build similar sized native craft, the Claddagh fleet could not compete.

In 1867, Thomas Brady, Secretary of the Special Commissioners of Irish Fisheries, cited the opposition of the Claddagh fishermen to trawling as a primary reason for their demise, but made no mention of the lack of finance available to them to build more suitable boats. As far as he was concerned, they were authors of their own plight.

The *New Builder* publication of 1st January, 1883 continued the sad story of the Claddagh's decay when it stated that the fishing there was obviously still in decline although some of the old fishing practices "had been surrendered".

Even the very siting of the Claddagh village near the eastern end of the bay had now became a problem. As fish stocks became depleted in the inner bay, seeking new fishing grounds became essential. Ironically, when the Congested Districts Board were established in 1891, development aid was provided for harbours, boats and equipment in centres along the Connemara coast nearer to the fishing grounds, but not to the Claddagh which lay outside the service area of the Board. Thus, other fishing centres prospered at a time when many of the once proud Claddagh boats carried seaweed to augment diminishing incomes from fishing.

Not surprisingly, Claddagh morale was affected by falling earnings as was the capacity

of the villagers to maintain their village. Although some of the younger generation followed in their fathers' footsteps, others found work on the much maligned trawlers or sold their boats and emigrated to America. After King Edward VII passed by the *Garra Glas* area of the Claddagh to board ship at Galway docks during his visit in 1903, many more joined the British navy where their service during the First World War was especially valued. As many of the younger Claddagh generation continued their affinity with the sea in British navy ships, back home on Galway Bay, an ageing generation of fishermen witnessed the beginning of the end of an even older fleet.

For those who continued to fish, however, times were difficult. Fish prices fell frequently as trawlers catches often flooded the home market. Money was scarce and it became increasingly difficult to maintain the village homes. As well, it became a common practice to make payments for fish catches in public houses, which did nothing to enhance the finances of the villagers in general. It was time to call a halt and, again, the Dominicans came to help.

The Claddagh Hall

The result was the opening of the Claddagh Hall on the 2nd December, 1912 by Most Rev. Dr. O'Dea, Bishop of Galway. This fine community hall, which echoed in its stone facade the new Claddagh Church, built a little earlier, was designed by William Scott to accommodate a thousand people. It cost £800 to build, half of which was collected by Fr. Considine P.P. and Fr. Glendon. O.P. and the rest came as a special grant from the Congested Districts Board.

In a *Connacht Tribune* report (7th December, 1912) of his speech made after the official opening, Dr. O'Dea, Bishop of Galway, offered the hope that the hall would become the centre of the Claddagh, where all aspects of the fishing industry would be taught. He hoped also that everything which would help the people bring about a betterment in the keeping of their houses and the proper spending of their hard-earned money would be also taught in the hall.

His hopes were never fulfilled, however, because the much-needed capital to modernize the Claddagh fleet never materialised. As our story enters the nineteen-twenties, only one new hooker was added to the depleted Claddagh fishing fleet. Although, some of the Claddagh fishermen were now operating from trawlers, few ever got to own their own. Many of the old boats were either sold to local merchants or to boatmen in Connemara or left to rot where they lay along the quay walls.

End in Sight

The end was also near for the Claddagh village itself. Many of the thatched houses were in disrepair and coloured photographs published in *Irlande 1913* show some with deteriorating roofs. Others were still well kept, of course, and their whitewashed exteriors have been captured in countless photographs and postcards. Perhaps the Claddagh was last seen at its best in 1922 when the whole village was lavishly decorated for the installing of the historic statue of "Our Lady of Galway" in the Dominican church. Great arches of evergreens lined

the route of the procession to St. Mary's past homes especially whitewashed and decorated for the joyous occasion.

The best of the thatched homes, however, could not compare with the new series of houses built from 1925 onwards for British ex-service men at Beattystown and Frenchville just west of the Claddagh.

These large, semi-detached houses made the Claddagh homes look humble by comparison and speeded up the process by which the Town Commissioners eventually decided to demolish the old village and build a new one in its place. The main grounds for taking this decision was a lack of modern sanitation and water supplies in the old houses which made the Claddagh an unhealthy area within the meaning of the various Health Acts of the time.

In February, 1927, as the urban council debated the erection of further ex-service mens' houses, which necessitated the demolition of the old gun battery beside the former coastguard station at Fairhill, its engineer, W. N. Binns, was already helping to draw up plans for the new Claddagh Housing Scheme. The first of these submitted presented dismal reading for those seeking to retain at least the best of the old houses in the new development.

Clear Away and Rebuild

Of two hundred and fifty-five buildings surveyed, fifty-one were classed as "Poor", sixty-nine as "Bad", and one hundred and six as "Very bad" under normal housing conditions at the time. By then, twenty-nine were already in ruins and with cleaning and sanitation costs amounting to over £300 a year, the Council decided to act after Dr. Michael McDonogh, M.O.H., declared the Claddagh an unhealthy area on July 9, 1927. When the city branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society endorsed the rebuilding of the Claddagh, much debate ensued as to the size and financing of the new venture.

Plans for the new development submitted to an Urban Council meeting on the 3rd November, 1927 suggested 50 houses be built initially (out of 145) at a total cost of £30,000, of which £12,000 would come from Government funds and the remainder of £18,000 was to raised by the Council in the form of a fifteen-year loan.

Despite an enquiry held on October, 23rd, 1928, at which objections by Very Rev. Canon Nestor to the total demolition of the old Claddagh were discussed, it was decided to press ahead with the scheme. Thus, the *Connacht Sentinel* of 12th February, 1929 reported that the programme to build fifty houses initially was to start before 1st April of that year. A government grant of £70 per house was available plus a free grant of £5,000 and the council's share was to cost £6,500 raised by a loan, repayable in 15 years.

However, problems soon arose in the rebuilding scheme. On May 13, the *Connacht Sentinel* reported a heated Council meeting allowing an increase of £450 to be added to the successful tender of £15,300 originally submitted by the Kennedy building firm from Sligo. By August 26, an editorial in the same paper was already questioning the small size of the new houses, and wondered if the people could pay the new rents of five shillings a week demanded to help finance the scheme. It was obvious that the rebuilding of the Claddagh did not meet with general approval.

Dissatisfaction

Dissatisfaction increased during 1931 and an Arbitration Inquiry into the Claddagh Housing Scheme on the 30th September was adjourned, as the *Connacht Sentinel* reported, in pursuance of a resolution of the Urban Council passed on the previous day, which stated that:

> *"it was useless to proceed with the scheme and consequently unnecessary to hold the inquiry".*

To ensure the adjournment, Fr. F. Newell, after leading about 200 people from the Claddagh into the Council Chamber, stated that:

> *".....the people were opposed to the inquiry and to the building of the houses which could only be let at the exorbitant rent of five shillings a week. The poor fishermen of the Claddagh often did not earn five shillings a week and they did not want to assume responsibilities which they conscientiously felt they would be unable to discharge. All the people wanted was that the Urban Council should carry out its first and obvious duty, which was to provide a sewerage scheme for the Claddagh".*

At this stage, the Chairman of the Council, M. McDonogh, T.D., suggested adjournment of the meeting to a date later in the year, adding:

> *"There is a good many good houses that could, with a little expense, be made habitable and it seems a pity to knock these down and build new ones when the people don't want them (applause). We could improve the existing houses, perhaps, where the engineers are satisified they could be made habitable".*

By December 8th, local papers reported on the resumed inquiry on the 4th December under dramatic headlines such as "Will Good Houses be Condemned" and "More Objections to Removal". Mr. G. Hewson, arbitrator under the Claddagh Housing Scheme, resumed the inquiry to fix compensation for disturbance and demolition of houses under the proposed building scheme and to determine the value of the land to be taken over. Mr. Micks, B.L., appeared for the Urban Council, Lord Hemphill appeared for a number of the Claddagh tenants and Mr. Blake, solicitor, for landlords on the Claddagh estate. Mr. M. J. Tighe, B.E., valued for the Urban Council and Mr. H. McGlory and Mr. J. M. Lavelle, auctioneer, for the tenants.

Among the Claddagh tenants who gave evidence at the inquiry were Honor Greaney, Martin Burke, Annie Barrett, Simon Kerrigan, Martin Conneely, Brigid Noone, Mrs. Barrett, Michael O'Brien, Nora Hynes, John Flaherty, Mary O'Shaughnessy, Michael Flaherty, Mary Connaughton, Michael Connell and Julia Wallace. Many spoke of their wish to retain their old homes with proper sanitation facilities installed and, under cross-examination, pointed out that most of the buildings lacked repairs due to the demolition threat hanging over them for some years past.

Others worried about the high rent they would be have to pay in the new houses leading one fisherman to declare:

> *"Of course, if I get a new house at a reasonable rent, I would take it, but there is no use going in the front door and out the back!"*

Dilemmas

As we reach the surface in our pool of Claddagh history, we find it tossed by the winds of dilemma. The Urban Council, although wishing to acceed to popular demands to retain the best of the old houses, found it could not do so due to cost. On the other hand, it soon became obvious that some of the fishermen would have trouble paying the rents needed to finance the project.

The fishermen and their families had their problems also. As well as the rent factor, there was disturbance involved while the old houses were being demolished. Some families were temporarily housed elsewhere while the work continued and many were unhappy with the siting of the new houses or with the compensation paid for their old homes.

Despite these problems, by April 1932, the *Connacht Sentinel* was to report that ninety-three houses had been erected at a total cost of £34,000. The rent charged came to five shillings for a three-roomed house, and six shillings for a four-roomed. Even then, there was a loss of seven pence in the pound to the Council.

The Galway Chamber of Commerce next offered a solution to the Claddagh housing problem, suggesting work be provided for the fishermen to enable them to pay the rents. The Chamber advocated the building of a pier to facilitate deep sea fishing and the financing of suitable boats for the Claddagh fishermen. The possibility of allowing the fishermen to drift net for salmon in the bay was also mooted at this time, but by February, 1933, the Government decided against it.

Other more pressing matters, however, were occuping the minds of the Urban Council and in 1933, the Fr. Griffin Memorial Road was opened at a cost of £6,000. This new "magnificiant boulevard" cut across the old Fairhill Road and changed dramatically the environs of the Claddagh. Three avenues from the new Claddagh debouched upon the road and a central oval-shaped block of buildings abutted on the newly opened national school on top of the hill overlooking the Claddagh. In March, 1934, more changes took place when, at a cost of £12,000, the present Wolfe Tone Bridge replaced the old iron one erected in 1887.

One thing that did not change, however, was the ever increasing difficulty of the Claddagh fishermen to make a living from the sea. Where sixty-eighty boats fished from the village shortly before, now only eight still carried on the old tradition on a regular basis. Conditions worsened towards the end of 1933 when the winter herring shoals scattered further out into even deeper water due, it was said, to the activities of Sea Fisheries Association trawlers.

Disappearing Village

By March 20th March, 1934, the *Connacht Sentinal* reported another 35 houses completed. However, the remaining thatched houses looked a sorry sight and led Mrs. Grossman, a visiting housing expert from St. Louis, U.S.A., to comment in the 3rd July issue of the *Connacht Sentinel*:

> *"It is a great pity that these houses with their quiet charm should disappear. On the other hand, the insanitary conditions of the houses made them unfit for human habitation".*

Over the following years the old village was gradually replaced by the rows of tidy, two storied houses, complete with gardens, of today. The main section in the "Big Grass" area was finally demolished when Mrs. Sarah Curran's home, the last thatched house still standing, was removed in 1938.

The next section to disappear was the *Garra Glas* area north of the church. Some alterations had already taken place with the construction of Fr. Griffin Road in 1933, which led to the demolition of the old national school, where the weigh-house is today. Part of this area became the site for the fire station which was officially opened in 1956. This occured despite the following suggestions contained in the Sketch Development Plan prepared for Galway Corporation by Dublin architect Dermot O'Toole in 1944:

> *"GARRYGLASS – This little area adjoins the Claddagh and contains a small group of thatched cottages which are representative of the original Claddagh. The Consultant hopes that the planning authority will give favourable consideration to the retention and preservation of this group as a folk centre. He does not suggest that the cottages should continue to be inhabited but is of the opinion that if preserved, it will more than pay for itself as a tourist attraction to the city".*

Sadly, these suggestions were not acted upon and a marvellous opportunity was lost to preserve and present the old customs and mode of living in the original settings of the *Garra Glas*.

The last remaining buildings in the entire area, were finally removed as late as 1967 when those belonging to Maggie Halloran and Bridie Molloy were taken down to make way for the new housing scheme on Whitestrand Road.

Perhaps Stephen Rynne, writing in 1956 in his book, *All Ireland*, best summed up what had happened:

> *"..... There is nothing anymore to say about the Claddagh; it is sucked sweet; the deed has been done, the fishing colony demolished".*

Last of an Ancient Landscape

With the demolition went the last view of an ancient landscape, dating back to a time when the first people came to erect simple huts beneath a canopy of trees beside the Corrib.

With the fishing colony went the last traces of a unique Gaelic community which reversed the usual pattern and saw a foreign town grow up in the shadow of its homes. No longer would one hear the keening at a Claddagh wake, or the Claddagh lilt to a language honed by time itself as the little houses, built where space allowed, came tumbling down.

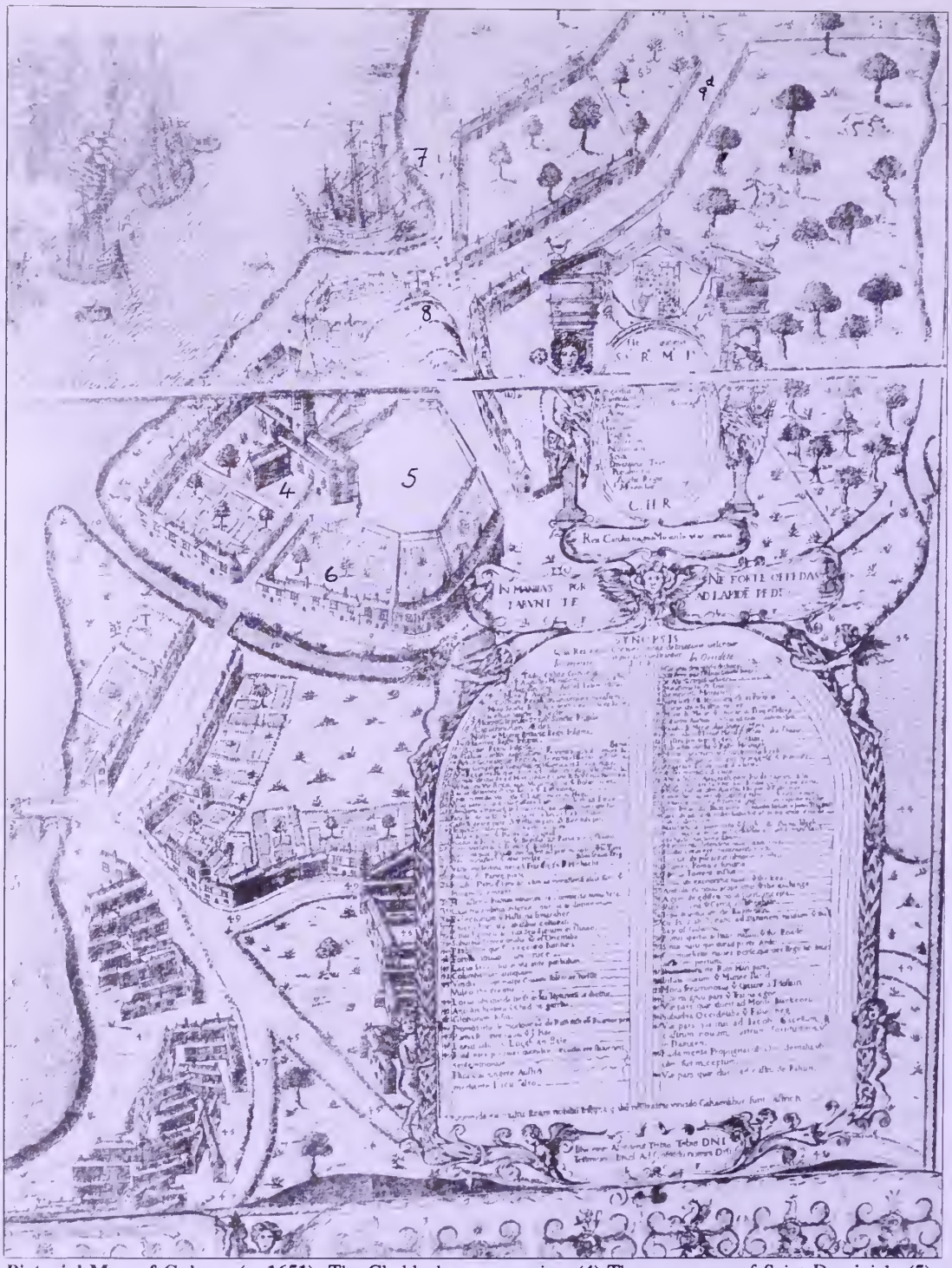
Uprooted, as the fishermen were from their old environment, folklife and customs died amid the ordered streets and gardens of the new Claddagh. The open fireplace with its smokey hob, gave way to the iron range and built-in oven. Ghosts and "Gliomachs' vanished in the glare of electric lights. The older generation grew silent as the radio filled their homes with news and music of the day. The Claddagh had become another housing estate.

Eóin Concannon, the last king of the Old Claddagh, saddened at the death of his village and the demise of his once proud fishing fleet, felt the loss more than most and passed away in 1954. With him died an ancient way of life.

Today

Today, the surface of our pool of Claddagh history has settled gently on its past. St. Mary's on the Hill is still there and its Dominicans serve a people as faithful as ever. The old fishing boats have experienced a revival in the recent past and some of the *Gleóiteogs* have been lovingly restored and sail again. There is an active resident's association which worries about sewerage treatment plants and developments in South Park. There is even talk of rebuilding part of the old thatched village again beside the Claddagh Hall and scale models have been constructed by Tom Connolly of Whitestrand Road and also by the students of the nearby Fr. Griffin Road Technical School under the guidance of Building Construction teacher, Gerry Keady.

Despite changing life patterns, however, one custom hasn't changed at all. Each August, the traditional "Blessing of the Bay" by the Dominicans still attracts the crowds although fishing from the Claddagh is now quite small. As one mingles among the descendants of this old fishing village, echoes whisper gently from the past, and speak of ancient wanderers who first came to stop and stare at the wonders of this stony place we call "The Claddagh'.



Pictorial Map of Galway (c. 1651): The Claddagh area contains: **(4)** The monastery of Saint Dominick, **(5)** The cemetery of the monastery, **(6)** Several gardens, **(7)** The place where ships are repaired, **(8)** St. Mary's Hill, **(9d)** The road to Cave Hill. (From Galway Archaeological & Historical Society reprint).

Thomas Phillip's MS. Survey sketch (1685): The road winding from the Claddagh to Ball's Bridge is shown on the left. A row of thatched houses leads to Martin's Mill and the Great West Bridge (O'Briens Bridge today). Ships lie at anchor in the old medieval harbour in front of the Spanish Arch. (Permission from the Council of Trustees of the National Library of Ireland).

Plan de Galloway **by J. N. Bellin, Paris, (1764):** Three roadways are depicted leading westwards through the Claddagh and another goes southwards through a swamp to Rintinane Point on the south-west tip of the Corrib estuary. (Permission from the Council of Trustees of the National Library of Ireland).

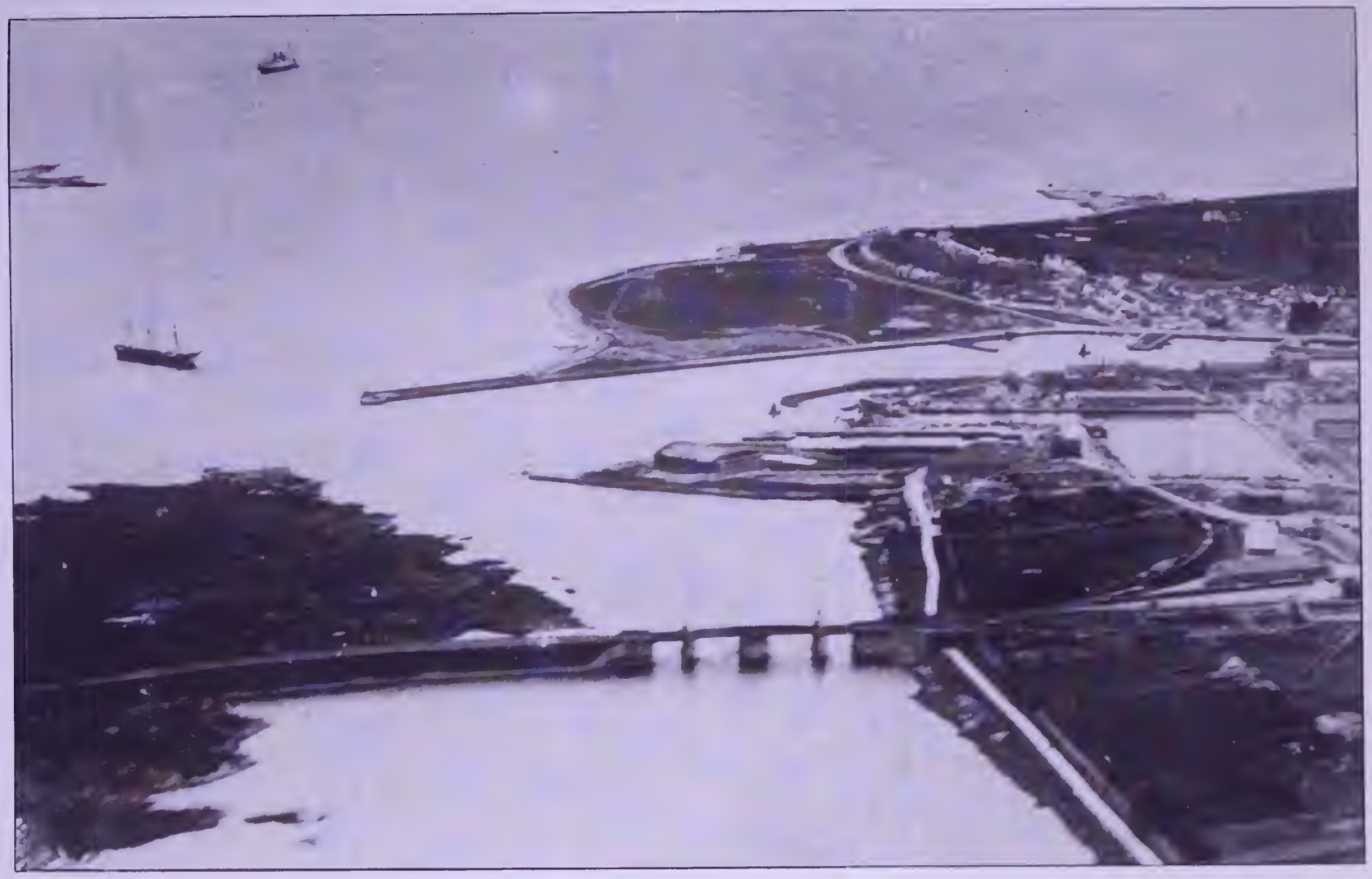
rt of Ordnance Survey 6-inch Sheet 94 (Surveyed 1838-9): This map shows the road leading southwards through the Garra Glas, by the Revenue lice Barracks and Coast Guard Station to the bottom of Fairhill and then along by the shoreline to the newly built Nimmo's Pier. A few years later, s pier was joined to the Claddagh Quay and the marshy area, the Swamp, later South Park was filled in. (Ordnance Survey Permit No. 5849).

James Hardiman's 'History of Galway' S.W. View of Galway (1820): No quays have been built yet at the Claddagh and Hookers lie at anchor in the Quay Stream below O'Briens Bridge. Rowing boats lie on the foreshore and people rake up sea-weed before the tide turns. The main harbour of the town now lies at the end of Long Walk, where the mud dock is today.

'Hand-book of Galway, Connemara' (1854) sketch of the Claddagh: Smoke rises from the thatched houses beneath the belfry of the Church of St. Mary on the Hill. Fishing nets lie drying in the sun while others are repaired on the ground. Spillets (fishing lines) hang ready from a gable, while a fisherman, with one in his hand, bids farewell as he sets off on a fishing trip.

An Oxonian's 'Little Tour in Ireland' (1859) sketch of the Claddagh: Seagulls, geese, hens, pigs, upturned boats, thatched houses with smoke rising, are all part of the backdrop as the Claddagh awaits the return of its fishing fleet.

Royal Visit to Galway (1903): King Edward VII passing by the Claddagh Basin during his 1903 visit to Galway. People line a wooden viewing platform as the open coach approaches from the Garra Glas area . A ceremonial line of troops with plumed helmets line the route to the docks. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne).



Aerial View of Galway Bay and harbour (1928): This army air corp photograph shows a liner anchored off Mutton Island and the huge iron barque, *Nordly Set,* aground off Nimmo's Pier. The old sailing ship ran ashore on Mutton Island in November, 1914 and was later towed in and beached off the Claddagh by the *S.S. Dún Aengus*. She was eventually scrapped by the Hammond Lane foundry. A cycling track is visible in the 'Swamp' and the new line of ex-servicemen houses at Frenchville stretch out towards Grattan Road from the Claddagh. Two Claddagh Hookers can be seen sailing out to the fishing grounds. (Courtesy Department of Defence).

empowered to decide all quarrels and punish all minor offences among the Claddagh population, without troubling the police and legal magistracy at all".

An extract from *The Irish Builder* of 1st January, 1883 supplied similiar observations:

"..... The fishermen elected from among themselves on St. John's Day officers whom they call a mayor and Sheriffs on which annual occasion they marched through the town of Galway, proceeded by men carrying bundles of reeds, fastened to the ends of poles, with which at night they set fire to numerous bonfires".

Perhaps Black's *Guide to Galway* (1888) gives the best summary of 19th century perceptions of the Claddagh and its king:

"The Claddagh is the name given to that part of Galway adjoining the harbour, and inhabited chiefly by fishermen, the total population numbering about 4000. They may undoubtedly be regarded as representing the original Celtic inhabitants of the town, as they have never intermarried with the 'transplanters', that is with the Saxon and Norman colonists introduced at different periods. Formerly they were recognised as a distinct community, governed by their own magistrate or mayor, called the 'King of the Claddagh', and although now under municipal rule, they still acknowledge the authority of their own 'king' as supreme in regard to many of their affairs. The election of the 'king' and other magistrates takes place on the eve of St. John".

Duties of The Claddagh King

Little has been written about the exact duties of the king of the Claddagh although his kingdom extended over land (the Claddagh) as well as the waters of Galway Bay. However, an extract from Mary Banim in her work, *Here and There Through Ireland* (published in 1892) gives an inkling:

"In former days, the King, or mayor, was elected annually with great pomp and ceremony. He was chosen from amongst the other men because of his intelligence and wisdom. His duty it was to guide the fleet safely at sea, understand the laws of the bay and see them enforced; while on land he was the lawgiver of the entire colony, none of whom ever dreamt of going into a land-shark's law court, but abided rigidly by every decision of their own chief".

At sea, he swapped his mayor's hat for that of admiral of the bay. He regulated the days on which the fleet sailed and punished those who broke the rules. He even ordained when the herring fishing could commence. The above extract continued:

"When the fleet sailed out, the King, acting as admiral, led the way – a colour at the mast-head distinguishing his boat – chose the fishing ground and gave the signal, at which every boat cast its nets at the same moment, so that all might be equal sharers in the harvest God was pleased to send".

Coming home after the night's fishing, the sailing order was reversed and the king was last to berth and land his catch. This, of course, was not to his benefit, but the extract also noted:

"Unlike all other sovereigns, the Claddagh King, while supreme in his authority, never tried to take any worldly advantage over his fellows; he was always, as now, a

fisherman as humble as, and no richer than, the others; he never sought to exact tolls or levy taxes, but lived the same simple life of brotherhood, guarding only the interest common to all".

Names of Claddagh Kings

Surprisingly, given the duties mentioned above, one of the first Claddagh 'kings' to have his name recorded was a Dominican priest. The editorial in the *Galway Vindicator* of the 12th May, 1887, gives concise details:

"The King of Claddagh has passed away. The late Very Rev. Fr. Folan, who, having made many valiant efforts to advance the interests of the poor fishermen, was, for many years before his lamentable death, regularly elected as King. We may say the royal position was elective and not hereditary".

Not long afterwards, the traditional election process seemed to have been temporarily dispensed with because, according to Mary Banim:

"This custom of appointing their own ruler prevails among the Claddagh folk at the present day, with the difference that, in place of an annual election, the distinction seems to have become vested in one family, whose name, curiously enough, is King".

The writer then proceeded to describe the king, named Padge King, who was the great-grandfather of John Francis King, the present well-known local radio broadcaster:

"The present head of the Claddagh, Padge King, is a man a little over the middle height, grave and quiet in manner, with an honest, earnest look, like that of a man who thinks a good deal and does not talk much; a something in his face, a good, kind look in his eyes, makes one wish to shake hands with him, and he has the natural ease and refinement of manner so often met with in our people".

How well these words describe Padge can be gleaned from the photograph of him originally published by Maurice Semple in his book, *Where the River Corrib Flows*. The king is depicted wearing a flat, round hat which gives him a certain air of authority. His right hand rests on the shoulders of his wife who is dressed in the typical shawl and *práiscín* apron of the time. To the king's right stands one of his sons who wears a tam on his head which gives him a typical fisherman's look.

All three stare at the camera with a certain air of suspicion. Cameras and *stráinséirí* (strangers – which the camera operator more than likely was) were intruders in their timeless world. As the 20th century dawned, that world would vanish and a close-knit community, unique in its customs, legends and way of life would be dispersed by the dictates of modern needs and mores.

A Special Community

No one knows precisely when that same close-knit community of the Claddagh was founded but archeological evidence suggests that people lived along the old shorelines of the River Corrib for thousands of years. The boy who gave his fish to St. Enda lived in the harbour area in the 5th century, an area subsequently divided in the 13th century when the

> *"Here they seem a contented race"* he wrote, *"and, satisfied with their own society, seldom seek, or are ambitious of that of others. Strangers, for whom they have an utter aversion, they never suffer to reside amongst them"* .

A hundred years later, this same aloofness drove Stephen Gwynn to despair when he commented in his book, *A Holiday in Connemara*:

> *"I have never found any other community in Ireland so alien, so shy, and so hard to know"* .

Thus, for all practical purposes the Claddagh people kept to themselves and in the long history of the city of Galway it is difficult to find a reference to the fishermen becoming involved in any local conflict, siege or electioneering process. Hardiman, was one of the first to comment on this apect of the Claddagh character:

> *"They* (the Claddagh people) *neither understand nor trouble themselves about politics, consequently in the most turbulent times their loyalty has never been questioned, and they are exempt from all government taxes"* .

Later in the century, during the Land War, when western tenants in particular (all the Claddagh people were tenants of the Whaleys, and later the Dalys, Grattans and others) joined with Michael Davitt and the Land League in the fight against the landlord system, the villagers showed little interest in the various campaigns. Again, this strange attitude caused Stephen Gwynn, once a Parliamentary candidate himself for the district, to write:

> *"Election times show up curiously the separateness of this community. The borough area of Galway comprise two outlying parishes, with a crowded population of small labouring farmers – Irish speakers to a man. These people come in cheerfully to support the Nationalist party with voice and vote (and not with voice and vote only) because they are part of Ireland and the issues which interest Ireland generally interest them also. But to the Claddagh man you can only talk about the Claddagh; Ireland has no appeal to him. The land question does not touch him, for he has no land; the revival of fisheries along the coast has done him no good, for he was catching fish before, and had his own sufficient market....."* .

The Men of The Claddagh

All of this may lead one to believe that the Claddagh men in particular were passive by nature and in many ways they were. They were extremely superstituous and the sight of a red-haired woman on their way to sea was enough to cause the whole fleet to return to shore.

At first reading, this excerpt from *The Ulster Journal of Archaeology* of 1854 also brings their valour into question:

> *"The Claddagh men are not remarkable for the warlike spirit which characterises their inland neighbours. As a mob they are anything but formidable, being particularly nervous at the sight or report of firearms. They run helter-skelter into their little huts if but half-a-dozen red coats make a charge on them"* .

The important words to note here, however, are "as a mob" for the writer may be referring

to a minor 'whiskey' row among the Claddagh men who were partial to 'the drop' especially on coming ashore after days at sea. The writer continued:

> *"I cannot attribute this to deficiency of courage, but to the want of that dogged ferocity which has so often and fearfully shews itself in the excited mobs of Britain..... They are not boxers, not fond of personal encounter; – but touch one and you hurt them all: they will not scruple to join together to beat an offending 'stranger'.....They can show courage when it is called forth and sustained by the consciounsess of right. A few years ago they completely routed a considerable body of dragoons by casting showers of heavy stones from their slings"* .

But it was at sea that the Claddagh men showed their true worth and bravery as the writer concluded:

> *"There are no braver men at sea than the Claddagh fisherman, when they go forth with the priestly benediction, and the blessed salt and ashes"* .

This bravery is best illustrated on that dreadful Friday night in 1927 when twenty-five fishermen were drowned off Cleggan in one of the worst storms ever to hit the western seaboard. Much damage was caused in the Galway city area including the sinking of the sailing trawler, *Star of Cove*, owned by Peter Greene, which was anchored 'on the roads' off Mutton Island. Nobody was on board at the time, but, nearby, the Claddagh Hooker, *Truelight*, skippered by Martin Oliver, later King of the Claddagh, had just set its nets when the storm broke. *The Connacht Tribune* on the following Friday told what happened:

> *"A boat belonging to and captained by Martin Oliver, put out from Claddagh for the fishing grounds on Friday evening at 5 p.m., before there was any sign of the coming storm. The crew, which consisted of Oliver himself, and his brother Patrick, Patrick Naughton, and John Burke, all of Claddagh, shot their nets westward of the lighthouse. The storm arose after 6.30, and what happened then was described to a Connacht Sentinel representative by Martin Oliver himself.*
>
> *'We had out one anchor' he said, 'and then we put out a second one, which we had aboard. We did not try to take in the nets, as they acted as a kind of anchor. We had large stones in the boat and we tied some of those on to ropes and after tying the ropes to the boat we put the stones overboard to act as an extra anchor. In spite of all this, the boat flew before the wind at great speed.*
>
> *She was driven almost as far as Ardfry Bay, seven miles across from Galway, and all the time we kept shortening or lengthening our cables acording to the height of the waves. Near Ardfry one of the cables snapped and the anchor was lost. Later we lost two nets. Later the second anchor snapped, and we thought it was all over with us, as we had then only five of our seven nets and the ropes with the stones attached to act as an anchor.*
>
> *When at last the storm died down the 3-inch ropes were frayed to the thickness of a finger, and if it had lasted much longer they would have snapped. My brother was nearly thrown overboard with the cable snapped, as he was serving it out at the time"*

This harrowing experience did not deter Martin Oliver or the remaining Claddagh fishermen from continuing to fish, and the *Truelight* graced the waters of Galway Bay until

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Unlike their female counterparts in the town or countryside, their work often entailed running a business as well as a home, for the income of the household depended on their ability to dispense their husband's catch at a useful profit. The best white fish, herring and mackerel were often sold on 'The Concrete' in front of the Spanish Arch while they prepared the lesser fish for the household in order to gain the few extra pence for the rent. Their lives were busy ones, to say the least, and always there was the fear of the unknown as their menfolk set off on each fishing trip.

It it not surprising then that with all this making and mending nets, collecting baits and baiting hooks, selling the catch as well as doing the normal household chores that the women of the Claddagh had such willing child minders in the menfolk as well as the 'grannies' of the village.

Claddagh Grandmothers

As one delves a little further into the Claddagh's past, an even bigger surprise awaits. For the grandmothers played a most important part in the life of the village long before sending the children to school became the custom. The care and rearing of the younger children of the household was entrusted mostly to them. While the *bean-a-tí* (woman of the house) was busy at her many chores, and the men were engaged in fishing or mending their nets, the old grandmother rocked the cradle of the youngest and introduced the older ones to the mysteries of Claddagh life.

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In the old Claddagh, the grandparents were treasured people, who, though in the twilight of their years, still found a role to play. It is all so different in the Ireland of today.

The Children of The Claddagh

The children of early 19th century Claddagh grew up in a harsh but magical world. They went barefoot and their clothing left a lot to be desired. Many succumbed to early illness, such as consumption or cholera outbreaks, especially those of 1832, and of 1847 in the aftermath of the Great Famine. Those that survived were a hardy lot. Before the 1830s, their only schooling came mostly from the granny by the fireside. Here she taught her young charges to count and say their prayers and all the other little necessities of their little lives. Her legends, mingling with the tales of fishing adventures told by the older fishermen, were especially welcome as the family huddled about the glow of the evening fire.

> *"A schoolmaster amongst them"* according to Hardiman, *"would be considered a phenomenon; but of late there are some exceptions to this rule. How far education would make these poor people happier in themselves, or more useful members of society, is a matter of doubt, but it is certain that the trial has never been made, although a most respectable convent lies at the head of their village, to which they are liberal benefactors".*

It was not until September, 1846 that formal education was really put to the test in the Claddagh when members of the convent in question, the Domincans under prior, Fr. Thomas Rushe, opened a Piscatorial School beside the church. By 1850, five hundred and twenty-one Claddagh youngsters had left the cosy intimacy of their firesides and sat at high wooden desks to learn the art of making nets and lace as well as the other school subjects of the time.

Francis B. Head called to the school in 1852 and wrote about the visit in his book, *A Fortnight in Ireland*:

> *"The building in question, on which was inscribed in large letters, 'CLADDAGH NATIONAL PISCATORY SCHOOL, AN. MDCCCXLVI,' at a cost of £1200, had been constructed for the children, male and female, of the fishermen of the Claddagh..... . On entering I found, barefooted, but with clean faces and in decent attire, about 130 children in narrow rooms, in which the girls were instructed to sew, spin, read, and write; and the boys, in addition, to make nets, etc. On the walls were several pictures,*

it was sold in 1959. One might expect such raw courage to flow in Claddagh veins, but not however, the legendary gentleness exhibited by the men-folk to their children.

Stephen Gwynn describes this strange phenomenon:

> *"But a thing struck me which I have never seen elsewhere in Ireland, where generally men have a prejudice against handling babies or doing any thing else that is taken to be women's work. But here, in at least a dozen houses, I found the women bustling about while the man stood or sat with an infant on his arm – and holding it as a woman does, the arm making the same soft line where it supported the infant as a hammock holds a sleeper. It was curious to see, and very pretty – natural enough, too, when one considered; for the women must be out most of the day hawking their fish at the street corners"* .

The abiding memory of the men of the old Claddagh, however, is of a hardy race of fishermen, fearless yet respectful of the sea. Proud of their way of life, they refused to change their traditional fishing methods and constantly opposed those who tried to usurp their ancient authority over the waters of Galway Bay.

The Galway Vindicator of 30th January, 1892 rather proudly reported:

> *".... the Claddagh men were well dressed in their peculiar garb and when they marched through Galway were as fine a body of men physically and morally as could be met with within the four 'seas' of Ireland"*.

This pride of the fishermen was reflected right down to the very end of the Claddagh fishing fleet as Christy Flaherty, an ex-policeman in Preston, England, who was born in Fairhill in 1934 and left for England in 1948, explains in a letter to the author dated 14 November, 1988:

> *"I recall what was a general and regular scene of fishermen engaged in the preparation of their boats for an early departure to some secret fishing ground. You could see pride in their weather beaten faces, and rightly so, for they earned an honest living, gave character and industry to the town, and displayed skills which had been handed down from generation to generation for centuries. ALL SADLY GONE"*.

The Claddagh Women

Perhaps the main difference between the Claddagh and the emerging modern Ireland of the 19th century was the equality of the sexes in the village. Whereas the men went to sea and caught the fish, on berthing, the women of the village took over the unloading and sale of the catch. In fact, when one looks a little closer at the social scheme of things in the 19th century Claddagh, one is struck by the powerful influence exercised by the women in matters of selling the fish and dispensing with the proceeds. Here, at least, the women were 'more equal' than the men.

It was they who controlled the finances of the home including what their menfolk spent on such luxuries as whiskey and tobacco. Hardiman was one of the first to comment on this aspect of Claddagh life:

> *"The women possess unlimited control over their husbands, the produce of whose labours they exclusively manage, allowing the men little more money than suffice to keep their boats in repair, but they have the policy, at the same time, to keep them plentifully supplied with their usual luxuries, whiskey, brandy and tobacco, of which they themselves also liberally partake".*

Later in the century, the 1st January, 1883, edition of *The Irish Builder*, left readers in no doubt as to who still controlled the Claddagh purse strings:

> *"But it must be remembered that at the Claddagh, the women in the matter of rule, were always the men. The boats were unladen by them, the fish carried by them to the market, the husband not interfering. The women paid for everything, maintaining the complete control of the purse".*

Again, this rather strange (to the 19th and many 20th century minds) matriarchal system is reflected by S. Reynolds Hole writing under the pseudonym of "An Oxonian" in his *A Little Tour in Ireland*, when he wrote:

> *"..... the men give up their cargoes to the women on landing, only stipulating that from the proceeds they may be supplied with a good store of drink and tobacco, and so get due compensation on the shore for their unvarying sobriety at sea".*

Why this system operated is explained by Mary Banim:

> *"Our excursion on the bay* (in 1892) *with the Claddagh King* (Padge King) *naturally led us to visit the Queen in her household, where, as it right and proper, she rules supreme. The Claddagh people may or may not meddle in politics, but they are thorough-going home-rulers; the fishers mind their part of life's business and leave all home matters to their wives. As the men's life only deals with a world which, though a rough and hard and turbulent world enough at times, is yet one that is simple and open and honest in its way, these fishermen are not (or at least so the wives consider) sufficiently accustomed to the cunning twists and turns of the sharks that inhabit land to be a match for the way of the work ashore; and so the women it is who manage all affairs connected with life on land, and who are universally considered more quick-witted and more acutely intelligent than their husbands and brothers".*

This system continued for generations, it seems, until one fisherman finally tried to break the rules with rather dire results as the above article in the *The Irish Builder* reported:

> *"A story is told of an instance of a man wishing to keep his own money, but the indignant companions of his wife threatened to burn his house and actually proceeded to such violence that poor 'Jerry Sneak' was forced to succumb".*

The Claddagh women were also to the fore in matters of local politics and were not afraid to voice their preferences in ways unique to the village. Thus, we get the rather colourful description from *Tales of the West of Ireland* by James Berry, of how the Claddagh women backed up a candidate named French in a local election by casting vile missiles of 'fish offal and filth' in the eyes of his opponent's followers! Nearly a hundred years later they showed their displeasure at a visit to the village by some famous painters when, according to Harold Speakman in his book, *Here's Ireland*:

> *"And of painters, such men as Walter Osborne of the early nineties, who was the first painter to be chased out of the Claddagh by women in red petticoats; and Augustus John who was the second.....".*

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the most striking of which was a very large fish; there were also maps, the model of a ship, etc. The improvement in their (the children) appearance was certainly very striking".

Later, St. Nicholas National School, still known affectionally as Miss Shiel's school, was established at the town end of the *Garra Glas* where the weighbridge is today. With the opening of the present St. Nicholas National School in 1934, the other two schools closed and a special piece of Claddagh history slipped quietly into memory.

Memories fade, and the names of many dedicated teachers are already lost to Claddagh folklore. One name stays afloat, however, for Daddy Quoyle, headmaster and later attendance inspector of the Piscatorial School, is immortalised in the following lines, composed, perhaps, by some Claddagh youngster playing truant among the boulders of the 'big strand':

Daddy Quoyle is a very good man,
Teaches his children all he can,
Reading and writing and arithmetic
And never forgets to use the stick.

Even the schoolhouse itself was rather intimidating as Mary Banim noted:

"A little below lies the village, guarded by a large schoolhouse – the Claddagh Piscatory School – which is surmounted by the figure of a sailor, who stands on the roof keeping a watch out at sea, and an arm (minus a hand, like Cap'n Cuttle) raised in warning to little Claddagh boys and girls to leave off play and come to school".

No wonder then, that so many Claddagh youngsters longed to see the school gates open, for beyond lay the wonderful world of water and strand, of boats and fish, and of granny and her stories. One such youngster was Michael O'Flaherty, who was born in the Claddagh in 1906. He made his fortune in Canada and in his autobiography entitled *The Claddagh Boy* (1963) he reminisced:

"When school was out the first day and the gates were opened, I dashed out. There was my grandmother waiting for us with a penny grinder, or French bread, as we know it now. I think it was the best I have ever eaten. Every day after that my grandmother was there to meet us with a penny grinder. Bless her. To a small child grandparents are real angels, who protect them from the rest of the world.....".

Once school was over, however, the old Claddagh was a wonderful playground. There was hide-and-seek amid the maze of narrow lanes and down by the water there was the usual paddling and swimming as well as the thrill of collecting bait with the women of the village. Mary Banim mentioned another aquatic activity:

"To the right of the long pier is a little inlet of the sea, evidently expressly designed by nature for the pleasure of the children; for here, in every sunny hour when school is over, all the boys come for their natural and most engrossing amusement – regattas with their fleet of little home-made white-sailed cutters capitally built little boats, of quite a different make from land-boys' toy affairs; boats that seem related to the old bread-winners in the harbour, for the moment they touch the water, there they go

racing, flying, tacking, as lively and as eager to win the race, and seemingly as full of life, as their young owners running along the bank".

Later, when the boys grew older, they learnt to swim as Michael O'Flaherty tells us in his autobiography:

"Not all the days were windy; many were beautiful. It was those days we kids liked best because we could go down to the pier, and dive for coppers thrown into the water by tourists. We had learned to swim at an early age. The tourists loved to see us dive twelve or fifteen feet into the ocean and stay under looking for the money in the clean sand. It was a good, healthy life and it was carefree....".

Michael Griffin, in his eighties now, remembers the great swimmers of the Claddagh of his youth such as Thomas Kerrigan, Paddy Cubbard, Mike Connor, Thomas, Josie and Colie Flaherty, Matti Powell, Mick Connell and Stephen McDonagh who regularly swam across the Quay Stream to the Docks or out to the *Nordly Set*, the old Norwegian sailing barque once beached just south of Nimmo's Pier.

As well as swimming, the youngsters also indulged in hurling in the Big Grass area as they tried to emulate their elders on the great local team, Fr. Tom Burkes, who played at the nearby 'Swamp'. Hopscotch and skipping for the girls and pitch and toss for the boys also occupied the young minds of the Claddagh just then, before thoughts of earning the few 'bob' for sweets and a trip to the cinema (two pence for ice cream and four pence for the Estoria) became the fashion.

Chris Flaherty, the ex-Preston policeman, remembers some early enterprise shown by his generation:

"As boys, we would gather as much old fish netting as possible, piece them together, make one large net, and catch as many mackerel and herring we could off the beaches of South Park. Then we'd build a large bar fire, grill what fish we needed, sit around the fire and sing songs or tell ghost stories. Innocent activities admitted but we were better for all that. We would then hank the fish in 20's and sell them for a shilling a hank".

Too soon, it seemed, the innocence of youth flowed gently out with the Quay Stream as the need to earn a living, marry and settle down focused young minds on other things.

Last Claddagh Kings

These, then, were the people of the old Claddagh, who lived in a world of golden thatch, and who earned their living from the black boats of the sea. Sadly, as the 20th century brought its concrete houses and steam trawlers, the last Claddagh kings saw this special kingdom wither and die before their very eyes.

Eóin Concannon, or 'Eóinín of the Quays' as he was more generally known, presided over the death of the village. As the thatched houses came tumbling down around his home at the bottom of Dogfish Lane in the Thirties, one can only wonder at his thoughts.

The great sailing fleet had declined, as Eustás O Héideáin O.P. noted in his work, when once:

> *"..... there were over 200 boats in Galway's fishing fleet, and when the Claddagh boats were home in harbour there were so tighly packed that it was possible to walk from one arm of the harbour to another by stepping from deck to deck. In those days it must have an impressive sight to watch the whole fleet leave for the blessing of the bay".*

Sadly, the chapter continued:

> *"In August 1941, an entry in the house chronicle of St. Mary on the Hill recalls that only 18 hookers sailed out that year. Yet a new era in fishing had already begun, as the chronicle noted: 'for the second time in history motor driven trawlers participated in the ceremony".*

Eóin Concannon passed away in 1954 and in the New Claddagh, the need for a king did not arise initially.

It was not until August 1971, and in conjunction with the new Claddagh Festival, that the great survivor of the Cleggan Night disaster, Martin Oliver, became the new king. Classed as one of the last of the great Claddagh fishermen, Martin had fished Galway Bay for over 70 years. He first felt the harsh Atlantic spray as a teenager in the 'Shamrock', and then for 40 years in his own boat, the 'Truelight', before selling this last Claddagh Hooker to poet, Richard Murphy, at the end of the Fifties. Up to his death, he sailed a smaller *Gleóiteog*, the 'Patricia', often leading the way in this more manageable boat at the annual Blessing of the Bay. He died at the end of 1972 aged 82 and the press report on his funeral stated:

> *"The funeral took place to Rahoon Cemetery after Requiem Mass in St. Mary's, The Claddagh and the large attendance included the Mayor, Mr. Ml. O'Higgins, members of the Borough Council and the Claddagh Festival Committee and the remains were borne by a horse drawn hearse".*

The last king to be elected was Patrick Ladneen Curran, who was born in the Claddagh on 29th July, 1906. *The City Tribune* of 6th January 1989, continued the story:

> *"Ladneen Curran has been King of the Claddagh since 1973. When Martin Oliver, the last king died, the people of the Claddagh held a vote and they elected Ladneen King of the Claddagh for life".*

The new king tried his hand at many types of work, both here, in England and America where he married Kate Gannon, formerly of Long Walk, on St. Stephen's Day, 1930. Back home again, he took up fishing until he retired in the Seventies. During his retirement, he delighted in representing the Claddagh as king at the Galway Races and other festivals, in St. Patrick's Day Parades, and even on the Late, Late Show with Gay Byrne.

Ladneen lived at the end of Fr. Burke Road, overlooking the promenade at Grattan Road. As he looked out over the bay, the waves continually reminded him of the past and of the people who made him king. As Father Leo Ward pointed out in his book, *God in an Irish Kitchen*:

> *"They give their strength to the waves, they pull their poor livelihood out of the ocean; every hope or fear they have, and their loves and hates, go up and down with the tides".*

Ladneen Curran passed away on Monday, 26th July, 1993, the first day of the Galway Races. A great mist swept in from the Atlantic as the racegoers gathered for the evening meeting. As the rain began to fall, the last King of the Claddagh was gone and an era had passed.

Claddagh faces from the Past: From a drawing by John McEhrlan in the Ulster Archaeological Journal of 1854. The Claddagh men shown are: From the top left: Murphy and O'Donnell. Centre: Mullaly, O'flaherty and Tierney. Bottom: O'Hanlon and Rainey.

Pupils of St. Nicholas' (Miss Shiel's) National School in the Old Claddagh: Back Row, from left: Nora Flaherty, Bridgie Conneely, Eileen Graham, Annie Flaherty, Julie Costello, Madge Griffin, Cis Joyce and M. Corcoran. Second Row: - Conneely, Nora Flaherty, M. Graham, Bridgie Flaherty, Julia Keane, Margaret Corcoran, Nellie Cosgrove, Mai Halloran, Sarah Cubbard, Nellie Molloy, Jenny Walsh. Third Row: ?, - Cubbard, P. Connell, P. Coyne, W. Folan, C. Norman, W. Kelly, Delia Lee, Sis Joyce, M. Browne, M. Cosgrove, M. Darcy and Mary Julia Raftery. Front Row: M. and Teresa Kelly (standing), T. McDonagh, P. Carrick, N. McDonagh, L. Connell, Mary Kate Sullivan, A. Folan, S. Cubbard, M. Parsons, S. Flaherty, Regina Raftery. (Courtesy Tom Kenny and Mary Julia Browne).

Summer Holidays in the Claddagh: A happy group of children enjoy the Summer break from school. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

King of the Claddagh: Photograph of Pádge King, King of the Claddagh, in the late 19th century with his wife and perhaps his son who was later killed in the Battle of Jutland. (Courtesy Maurice Semple).

King of the Claddagh: Photograph of Eoin 'of the Quays' Concannon, King of the Claddagh, sitting on 'the Colya', his favourite stone bollard near the entrance to the Claddagh Basin. On the left stands Eddie Shea, Abbeygate Street and Willie Crowe of Woodquay stands on the right. (Courtesy Maggie Crowe).

King of the Claddagh: Photograph of Rev. Fr. O'Beirne O.P. (left) Prior of St. Mary's, making a presentation to Martin Oliver in August 1971 on his enthronement as King of the Claddagh. Also in the picture are Mary Trill, Sally Feeney, Molly Browne, Maureen Cunningham (daughter of the king) and Rev. Fr. J. Gannon O.P. (Courtesy Maureen Cunningham).

King of the Claddagh: Photograph of Paddy Ladneen Curran and his wife, Kate Curran, August 1973, on his inaugeration day as King of the Claddagh in succession to Martin Oliver. (Courtesy Kate Curran).

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The Claddagh Express: An excited group of Claddagh children climb aboard an empty Connemara turf cart for that special spin through the Old Claddagh. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell).

A Claddagh Chat: Mary Ellen Flaherty and Julia Curran enjoy a chat. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

A Meeting of old Friends: Michael and John O'Toole welcome Michael Griffin before setting off for the annual Blessing of the Bay in August, 1993.

Relaxing by the Quay Stream 1993: Paddy Moore, Billy Flaherty, and James Moore sit and watch as a youngster feeds the famous swans near the Claddagh Hall.

Different Ages - Different Faces - Different Places: The late Annie O'Flaherty of Fairhill Road, originally from Aran, with her great grandchild, Aisling O'Flaherty. (Courtesy Gretty Kenny and 'The Claddagh Long Ago' project, The Claddagh National School).

Claddagh National School Project Participants: Fourth Class (with Michael Griffin holding the City Challenge Cup won by the Fr. Tom Burke hurling team in 1929) display their project for which they received a high commendation in the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland Sheppard Trust Competition in 1990. The class consisted of Kieran Corcoran, Gerard Langan, Kevin Joyce, James Conneely, Niamh Noonan, Marie Griffin, Catherine Curley, Laoise Boyle, Oriena O'Connor, Karina O'Connell, John Burke, Gavin Dalton, Derek Merrigan, Keith Golding, Scott Black, Pádraic Connors, Thomas Warde, Shane Sullivan, Alan McDonagh, Patrick Quinlivan, Paul Ryan, Keith Flaherty, Tony O'Halloran, Martin Folan, Rónán O'Flaherty, Carol Durnin, Helena Flaherty, Emma Collins, Barbara Campbell, Lynda Shaughnessy and Patrick Turke.

Chapter 3

"A Thatcher's Delight" – The Story of the Claddagh Village

First Homes

The River Corrib had everything. Salmon frolicked in its currents and wild fruits lined its banks. The estuary gleamed with shellfish, and mullet nosed its shore. The first arrivals settled quickly in this bountiful place. Their simple huts of branches and animal hides formed the earliest human settlement where the Corrib meets the sea.

Such flimsy homes vanished in Atlantic winds, however, when others came to clear the nearby woodlands and settled down to farm. More sturdy dwellings, with clay and wattle walls braced with stout wooden posts, became the homestead of these Stone-Age farmers. Variations of their lightly thatched mud-walled homes dotted the Corrib countryside right down to medieval times.

The dwellings of the sea harvesters huddled together in sheltered hollows by the estuary shore. These small thatched huts evolved into the mud-walled cabins of later times and formed the nucleus of the Claddagh fishing village on the western shoreline. Meanwhile, in the 13th century, Norman strangers came to dwell on the opposite bank. Their settlement hugged the safe ground around the great stone castle of the Red Earl, Richard de Burgo.

At the start of the 15th century, narrow streets of timbered houses roofed with thatch marked the architectural development of this emerging town of Galway. Atlantic winds were never far away, however, and fanned large fires in 1473, which devastated the growing settlement. Not surprisingly, stone replaced wood in the town's re-building program, and offered comfort as well as security to the householder, a fact noted by the native Irish across the river.

The Claddagh Appears on Maps

Eventually, the Claddagh became a sizeable village as is evidenced in the 1625 military map entitled, '*The Plott of Gallway with the Layinge out of the New Forte*' drawn up to show the position of a proposed star-shaped fort around the Dominican church and grounds. As well as noting that "*this Abbey belongeth to Mr. Darcy*", its description also states that "*..... within the Circuite of the ffoarte, there is a great many houses beside the Abbey all wch must be taken awaye*".

The fort was never built, however, and the village, then a suburb of the town, is rather fancifully depicted in the 1651 Pictorial Map of Galway. Terraces of two-storied slated

houses, complete with laid-out gardens, are shown surrounding the Church of St. Dominick in the area marked 'the South Suburbs'.

This map was compiled to impress the viewer, however, and a more authentic picture is presented in Thomas Phillip's Survey drawing of Galway as seen from the Claddagh of 1685. A row of single-storied thatched dwellings is shown stretching along the line of Dominick Street towards the Claddagh shore from the Great West Bridge (O'Brien's Bridge today). The heavy thatch and small windows of the buildings are clearly depicted. The typical Claddagh house had finally appeared.

Stone-Walled Thatched Homes

As the fishing industry improved and brought prosperity to the Claddagh during the following century, stone-walled homes gradually replaced many of the mud-walled cabins. Mud also gave way to mortar in bonding stone in the walls. Liberal coats of whitewash applied to the outer surfaces sealed the inside of the house from rain and wind.

Fr. Leo Ward in his book, *God in an Irish Kitchen* (published in 1939) described the scene:

> *"With its old houses – straw for their roofs, and rock and mortar for the walls, and every little end of a wall whitewashed a hundred times in blue or white or thin pink ..... A woman is whitewashing a wall as we pass. She uses the broom to spray the wall, and then she goes pat, pat, pat with her broom as if to make the liquid take".*

The stout walls carried beams of rafters, which in turn were overlain by insulating layers of earthen sods. The latter acted as a snug foundation for the thatch roof, which was laid on top and fastened with twisted hazel scallops. The era of the thatcher had arrived.

Village Increases

As we have already noted, the population of the Claddagh increased during the 18th century as fishing improved. By 1812, its inhabitants totalled 1,050 males and 1,286 females according to James Hardiman in his *History of Galway.* An expanding population needed fresh accommodation, however, and from the Shaw Mason Census of that same year Hardiman noted:

> *"The number of houses or cabins, which are all thatched, was returned, in 1812, at 468, inhabited by 500 families.....".*

As revenue from fishing increased during the last heady decades of the 18th century, love, it seemed, filled the Claddagh air and the younger generation, according to Hardiman:

> *".....generally intermarry with each other at an early age..... A cabin is soon provided for the new-married pair, who, now in their turn, commence housekeepers".*

The village grew in size and many new dwellings were constructed on the solid ground west of the church. In later times, the green area in front of this main section of the Claddagh became known as 'The Big Grass', and became a favourite haunt for the village geese. The smaller and more sheltered area east of the Dominican church became the '*Garra Glas*' (The Green Garden). The road depicted as "Leading to Cave Hill" in the 1651

Pictorial Map, became Fairhill where only the two-storied Aran View House and a terraced row of Coastguard cottages, built during the early part of the 19th century, contrasted with the gathering "clachan" of thatched homes.

A "clachan" consisted of a large irregular group of farmhouses clustered closely together whose inhabitants farmed the surrounding fields in the Rundale system of striped ownership and communal grazing. These "clachans" were scattered across the open landscape during the 18th century. In the emerging Claddagh of the period one might see a coastal version of the "clachan", in which the siting of houses was governed by the availability of space; where street plans were not a factor in the siting of the thatched dwellings; where the close-knit community had its special customs and practices and where fish instead of farm produce was the object of the harvest.

The irregular siting of the Claddagh homes are confirmed in 18th century maps, which show a vague scattering of buildings off the few roadways leading to Fairhill or along the estuary shore on both sides of the Dominican church in the 'Big Grass' and '*Garra Glas*' areas.

This haphazard arrangment of the houses led to problems of cleanliness when dung heaps and muddy passages marred the appearance of the village. Hardiman commented:

> *"Previously to 1808, the streets and exterior of this large village were as remarkable for want of cleanliness, as the interior of most of the houses was for neatness and regularity".*

Happily, a remedy was at hand as he exclaimed:

> *"About that time captain Hurdis of the royal navy, then commanding the sea fencibles of this district, persuaded the fishermen to appropriate a small portion of their weekly pay for the purpose of paving and cleansing about their houses, and since that time it has been observed that they have got rid of many of those contagious disorders which generally prevail in large irregular villages".*

This paving consisted of cobbled pathways laid between the dwellings, with central waste channels running down to the estuary. The work led to a more regular layout being adopted in the building of new houses and in a few areas terraced rows appeared. The best known of these was called the Rope Walk, where some twenty-six houses were eventually built to form a thatched "street" running in an east/west direction in the 'Big Grass' area.

During the 19th century, more "streets" made their appearance, due primarily to the custom of building on to the gable of an existing house (having got permission from the owner) and so alleviating the need to build two gables in the new dwelling. Thus, Fairhill became a "street" of thatched dwellings leading from the *Garra Glas* area to the coastguard station overlooking the sea at Grattan Road.

Dogfish Lane evolved in the same way skirting the boundary wall of the Dominican church grounds. On the western perimeter, a pathway with just one house was known simply as *Lána an Stráinséar,* (The Lane of the Stranger). In between, the main open area in the centre of the village was called "O'Dea's *Garraí*". Place names were the exception rather than the rule, however, and smaller sections were simply referred to according to who lived in them.

Hapazard Layout

This led to some confusion for the postman of the day, especially when houses fell into ruin as families died out or emigrated. To add to the problem, new houses were still constructed at various angles to one another, as the spirit of the "clachan" still survived amongst a people who worried little about the virtues of ordered city streets and lanes.

Fr. Leo R. Ward refers to this in his work:

> *"Their houses are close together in the hospitable Irish way, side by side, corner to corner, end to end, giving a kind of crazy jigsaw effect, and are like the rooms of a big ship drawn up here and moored to the rock that is called County Galway".*

H. V. Morton in his book, *In Search of Ireland,* published in 1930, notes this fact also:

> *"Nothing is more picturesque in the British Isles than this astonishing fishing village of neat, whitewashed, thatched cottages planted at haphazard angles with no regular roads running to them. If you took three hundred little toy cottages and jumbled them up on a nursery floor you would have something like the Claddagh. It is a triumph of unconscious beauty".*

This aspect is also mentioned by Mary Banim:

> *"At first sight, the village appears to consist of but a few houses, or rather thatched cabins, but on entering any of the numerous openings or laneways, the place is found to be much more extensive, the cabins being built in irregular squares and circles surrounding pretty little greens where the young children play, and where the women spread out their husbands' fishing-nets for mending or drying on round cairns or circles of stone, one of which is on every green. The houses are very small, and many show sad tokens of great poverty; yet, wherever the means will at all allow of the smallest comfort, they are neat and clean. Owing to the numerous open spaces, the air is pure and free, and the whole place commands as lovely a prospect as the heart could desire".*

An aerial photograph of 1928, shows the maze of thatched houses in the Big Grass and Fair Hill Road areas of the Claddagh prior to their destruction. By then, many homes were in poor condition, as the compulsory purchase order by Galway Urban Council came into effect. The names of the last families to occupy these particular houses (not necessarily the owners) are recorded in the pull-out map by Michael Griffin who lived in the heart of the old village. With help from Eileen Cloherty and Mary Julia Browne, he was also able to name the last occupiers of the *Garra Glass* end of Fairhill, where Mary Julia's parents, the Rafterys, owned a small woollen factory. This was one of three small industrial concerns operating in the Old Claddagh, prior to its demolition. The others were Murphy's Bakery and Connell's Joinery.

A few small shops were located in the village. Delia Burke owned one in Fairhill, Mary Hart another in Dogfish Lane, Mary Keane had one near the small *Garraí* in the far west of the village and Mrs. Sweeney another in the very heart of the Claddagh. Mary O'Donnell, Maggie and Mary Mullally, Sarah Curran and Moyra Lee sold potatoes, turf, straw, candles, sweets and lamp oil from little shops also.

Some slated houses also added variety to the bright glow of thatch and whitewash in the Claddagh scene. The Clancys, the Duggans, the Murphys, the Connells and the Tynans were some of the owners of these houses, and with the shops, woollen factory, bakery, and joinery, they helped provide a little variety to the Claddagh landscape.

The very essence of the Claddagh, however, was its humble thatched homes which, although varying in size, always retained their basic shape. The heavy thatched roof and white-washed walls were its trademark and featured in countless postcards and photographs, some of which are included in the following pages.

Visitors Comments on the the Claddagh Homes

Many descriptions of the inside of the old Claddagh homes have been provided in the past. One of the best comes from the pen of Mary Banim:

> *"The king's house is no larger than those of his neighbours. A thatched cabin, poor both without and within, but, at least when we saw it, very snug inside, and very neat too, in spite of the narrow space and the quantity of household and other articles to be stowed away on every side; for, along with the ordinary furniture, a fisherman's cottage contains a curious medley of articles – fishing-nets, and tackle and spare oars and sea-going odds and ends of every kind, as well as an assortment of chests in which to store up any extra valuables the owners may possess. Indeed it was a matter of great wonder to me how, with all this miscellaneous collection, such order and neatness could be preserved in the little kitchen....."*.

Another description of the Claddagh comes from the pen of Henry D. Inglis:

> *"I found the cabins in this colony very far superior to those of any country labourers I had seen. An air of decency was visible about them all. I saw none without chairs and bedsteads, and a respectable display of crockery....."*.

Not all visitors were enamoured with the Claddagh and its houses, however, and, in the decade following the Great Famine, S. Reynolds Hole as "An Oxonian", describes the post-Famine village in rather unflattering terms:

> *"They live (some 1500 souls in all) in a village of miserable cabins, the walls of mud and stone, and for the most part windowless, the floors damp and dirty, and the roofs a mass of rotten straw and weeds"*.

Not satisfied with this he proceeds to put more than just "the pig in the parlour":

> *"The poultry mania must be here at its height, for the cocks and hens roost in the parlour. But the 'swells' of the Claddagh are its pigs. They really have not only a 'landed expression', as though the place belonged to them, but a supercilious gait and mien....."*.

His ridicule of the Claddagh becomes a farce, however, when he states:

> *"Frank (his friend) solemnly declared that he saw one (a pig), as portrayed with his back against the lintail of his home, and smoking his evening pipe"*.

Perhaps the worst condemnation of conditions in the Claddagh comes from the pen of Francis B. Head who did a walking tour of the village in 1852. Described by John P. Harrington in his work, *The English Traveller in Ireland* (1991) as the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada who "*put down an 1837 insurrection with a severity that alienated the home office and necessitated circuitous travel home to avoid assasination*", one is not surprised when Head declares:

> *"In short, of all the dirty places in this world I have ever had occasion to visit, The Claddagh is the worst..... They really should be swept off the surface of the globe....."*.

One wonders why Head was so severe in his condemnation of the Claddagh in particular, because many villages of the time, especially in the aftermath of the Famine, were just as bad. Richard Lovett in his marvellously illustrated *Irish Pictures*, published in 1888, noted this fact after his visit to the village:

> *"The appearance of the village of the Claddagh is dirty, but the houses are clean enough inside; and be it known that before the famine their houses were models of cleanliness; and we must recollect that those manure heaps which frequently offend the eye in Irish villages have no offensive odour, on account of the deodorizing power of the peat which forms a large portion of the compost. The men and women have generally clean linen, although often covered with rags. It is a general fact worthy of note that in Ireland a dirty outside generally covers a clean heart"*.

Although, times and attitudes differ, H. V. Morton's words etch a somewhat similiar picture:

> *"Through open doors you see little rooms with low ceilings. There are warm, clean and comfortable; but so small..... and in these rooms, warm with the peat fires and loud with crickets piping in the ashes, a red light is burning before the Sacred Heart"*.

By 1939, however, the Old Claddagh, with all its faults, was disappearing as Fr. Leo Ward notes:

> *"Even so, it wasn't much – to a foreigner – except to look at; as the two old women said, it needed to be torn down. It never had any sanitary provisions, though the houses usually were wall to wall. It had to be new-roofed every year, or the occupants had to move from corner to corner of the rooms in an effort to keep dry. Some of the tight, dark and eyeless little bedrooms were not, as we shall see, much of a human habitation"*.

The old houses visited by Fr. Ward in the Big Grass area of the Claddagh, were, as he admits:

> *"by some strange version of well-being, the worst of them – perhaps not occupied when the Act of 1928 was passed – (and) are allowed to stand for the present and to be used"*.

Some time later, Richard Hayward, in his book, *This is Ireland, Connacht (Galway)*, published in 1952, sadly reports:

> *"As for the old Claddagh village, one of the few remaining parts of it, known as Garraidh Glas – green garden – was being demolished, to accommodate a Fire Station, even as Raymond Piper was making the accompanying sketch, which, on that account, will probably be the last living impression of the place to be set down by any artist".*

A few years later, the last two houses on the fringe of the Claddagh at Whitestrand Road were demolished. The thatcher and his world had vanished.

Memories Revisited

Fond memories still linger, however, of a world roofed in straw, of thick-walled houses and tiny windows, of open fireplaces and smoky hobs, of *práiscín* aprons and dressers filled with shining delph. That world comes alive again if we let imagination waft its way through special memories to recreate the Old Claddagh for us to visit and enjoy just one more time.

Thus, the village stands before us again, its white-washed walls and golden roofs shimmer in the Summer of our mind. A stroll takes us by the side of the Claddagh Basin, where a Spiddal man is busy peddling turf from a cart near the *Cúnga Mór* (Big Corner) at the *Garraí Glas*. Further on, the peace is quickly shattered as children stream from the school of Daddy Quoyle beside the granite church of St. Mary on the Hill. Their shouts of joy herald the start of Summer holidays. Nearby, elderly women hardly notice them as they climb new limestone steps to the church and enter a world of silence and prayer.

Nets hang like cobwebs along the Claddagh Basin railings as fishermen prepare púcáns and hookers for fishing at night. Ropes and creels lie everywhere. The King of the Claddagh is here, of course, happily dispensing advice from beneath a great wide hat. Nothing is left to chance by these farmers of the sea.

Dogfish Lane is on our right now and as we amble up its cobbled rise, low, single storied homes gently follow the contour of the slope, each heavy with its thatch and gleaming in a wash of white. The winding boundary wall of the priory forms the other side of the lane. Here, ancient stones groan beneath the weight of overhanging trees as branches seek to form an arch with the golden roofs. The cobbled surface lies in between, its stones polished bright by generations of feet. A drainage channel bisects the little laneway, a reminder that proper sanitary facilities are lacking in this ancient place.

As we reach the top of the lane, a sharp turn to our left leads us down through the heart of the old village. A broken row of houses lie to our right and little clusters of homes lead away to our left. The sloping walkway brings us to Michael Griffin's old home and as we pass by, a double row of buildings to our right becomes an actual street. We turn into Ropewalk, the main artery of the Claddagh.

We note again how the low the walls are in these single-storey homes, hardly rising more than eight feet to the thatch and varying in thickness from two to three feet. The building stones were gathered locally, we are told, but some limestone was also brought by boat from as far away as Tawin Island in the inner bay.

A normal sized house, about twenty seven feet in length stands in front of us now, a building simple in its charm and functionality. The white-washed facade is like a face

before us; its windows are dark eyes, its half-doored entrance a slender nose, its thatch a head of golden hair. As the stony gable narrows towards the apex of the roof, one small, lonely window shimmers like an island in a sea of white.

Come Inside

The shrill welcome of a linnet in a cage beside the door alerts the *bean an tigh* (woman of the house) to visitors. She invites us in, of course, for we are the wonder of the village just then and curiosity opens any door. Few are as quaint, however, as this half version which opens inward to another world.

We drop down quickly on to an earthen floor, its surface hardened by the patter of endless feet. The great room of the house lies before us now, and as our eyes adjust to a lesser light, the homespun treasures of the Claddagh kitchen gradually unfold.

The simple wooden table and straight back timber chairs speak of humble times but the dresser bursts with pride and shining delph. Placed opposite the open door, where Summer light and neighbours often linger, the gleaming jugs and brown and gold plates demand attention. Large plates proudly line the highest shelf, arrayed like captured battle shields on a medieval wall. Before them, a set of gilt jugs stand proudly to attention. The next shelf also has its jugs of gilt but the plates are smaller than those above. Below again, a fine array of shinning mugs hang loosely by their handles, while the fourth and final shelf contains the largest plates of all, each smothered by a host of foreign cups and saucers brought home by wandering sailor sons.

The open fireplace is before us now, where the old granny of the family commands the left-hand hob. The twinkling eyes belie the wrinkled face, however, as she invites us to a fireside seat and regales us with her stories of the past. Ghosts and banshees glow again amid the burning peat, and tales of Irish wakes and weddings rekindle in the magic of her words.

The *bean an tighe* is busy at her chores just now and, as she swings her skillet pot about on the great black iron crane above the fire, her rough canvas *práiscín* apron protects her hands from the steaming metal. A black kettle rests upon the darkened flagstone of the hearth. Nearby, an even blacker cat slumbers on his creepie stool and dreams of nights to come.

An old brass lamp is attached to the wall above our heads, its wick, for now, as lifeless as the sleeping cat below. The picture of the Sacred Heart hangs beside a door leading to the bedroom beyond. A rough wooden ladder rises to the loft room high overhead, where the children of the house sleep with only earth and straw to protect them from the stars. A net hangs from the rafters above our head also, for this, of course, is a fishing household. As preparations for the night's trip extend right into the heart of this old home, it's time to say goodbye now and take our leave.

Meet the Thatcher

The afternoon is fading amid the bustle of Rope Walk life and as we pass by the home of Tom Barrett, we meet old Tom Conneely who is thatching the roof. We compliment

him on his work as he balances a bundle of wheaten straw upon his shoulder and climbs a wooden ladder towards the sky of blue. He invites us to come and view him at his work. With trembling heart we climb the old ladder and lodge ourselves just beneath him as he explains the gentle art of thatching.

Tom has already completed the first line of thatch, in width about two feet from the gable ledge on our right. He had started in the right-hand corner at the bottom and is already more than half way up towards the ridge top in the new line as he places the bundle of hand-slashed wheaten straw beside him to his left.

> *"Now, to thatch a roof for the first time"* he tells us as he continues with his work, *"you need to erect your rafters first of all. They usually come from trees around the place, although, in truth, there's not a lot around here. The ones here have come from Menlo; there's a great wood out there, you know. The rafters usually consist of strong boughs, as straight as we can get, and we usually put up an uneven number, the auld pishróg, you know. Eleven rafters is the usual, about four feet apart and then come the lighter trasnáns or battens laid crosswise, about three feet apart. Over them are put lighter branches again, running up and down from the ridge, all hugging each other and making a nice bed for the bog scraws, which come next. The grass or heather part is placed towards the sky and we dig them out, usually eighteen inches wide and four feet long, or even six feet if the skin is good. Over them we place a coating of narrow bundles of straw about two fist-fulls wide, all tightly pressed together, and followed by a thin sheet of flattened straw, which completes the base for the thatch itself."*

He leaned over now and taking a fistful of the straw reeds, placed them with the level cut ends resting just above the newly laid thatch and the empty seed heads facing upwards towards the ridge of the roof.

> *"Once the ears have been removed and the reeds cleaned"* he continues to lay more handfuls of straw evenly across the line, *"we tie them in bundles for easy handling."*

We are already part of the action now as we pass more of these bundles up to him as he continues with his work. Tom next selects a suitable 'scallop' stick from a number of fresh hazel branches temporarily stuck vertically into the old roof to his left and lays it firmly across the newly laid line, inserting one end into the new thatch to the right.

> *"This stick is called the 'stretcher' and is also held in place by these three scallop 'keepers' which I am now driving into the base."*

When this section of the line was completed, he gently pressed the top section of the newly laid straw into place with the weight of his hand, smoothing out under where it touched the other line so that no drainage blockage would occur. He next took what appeared to be a mallot (a legget he called it) and used it to gently push up the cut ends of the straw until they came into alignment with the rest. A quick snip with his special clippers and a gentle run of his hand down along the worked section to remove loose straw and suddenly the newly laid portion was undistinguisable from the rest.

> *"That's it now"* he said. *"I'll continue on like this and depending on the weather, it may take over a week to reach the bob on top and complete the job. You know, I'll*

probably use nearly a ton of straw – that's about a million reeds of straw before my work is done here".

Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he murmers in the soft brogue of the Claddagh,

"You know, you would need a ton of patience for every ounce of energy in this job!"

We thank him for his time and information and, as he broadcasts some bluestone over his growing field of gold, to "keep away insects and mice", we take our leave of him and gingerly retreat down the ladder.

Other Claddagh Chores

All around us now, the women of the Claddagh are gathering their washing from whitewashed walls and little cairns of rocks they call "*suístíns*". The drying has been good and they have time now to sit and chat on long stone seats outside the little homes. Nearby in a *garraí* which bears her name, 'Penny' O'Dea is tending to her vegetables in a little walled garden, the only one we find in this ancient place.

There is an air of tranquility here amidst this sea of white and golden buildings, broken only by the sound of children playing in the *garraís* and the cackle of the village geese as they chase the stranger from their shore. Down by the Bankeen pier, a lazy wind is already filling the first of the brown sails.

Aerial View of the Claddagh (*c.* 1928): Two open areas are shown including the 'Big Grass' at the bottom of the picture and O'Dea's *Garraí* with electric light pole next to the Fairhill Road at the top. The Rope Walk runs from left to right through the centre and Dogfish Lane winds its way down around the Dominican priory grounds to the right. Fr. Griffin Road has not been constructed and only fields stretch northwards towards Sea Road and the Jesuit Church. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell).

The 'Big Grass' (1888): A stream flows through the 'Big Grass' area where the village geese and young hurlers disported themselves in later times. Houses, from the left, were eventually occupied by the Cooke, Feeney, Folan, Keane, O'Brien and Powell families. (Courtesy National Museum).

The 'Big Grass' (1920s): The stream has been filled in and a green sward, which gave its name to the area, provides a welcome open space where the villagers can play or, as the fisherman is doing, tending to his gear. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

The 'Big Grass' (Western section): The two houses on the right form the western end of the row of houses facing the 'Big Grass' and were occupied by the Wallaces and Barretts. The Hernons lived in the house on the left and the O'Flahertys in the building in the distance.

The 'Big Grass' (Western section): Michael Griffin Snr., former seaman in the British navy, and father of Michael Griffin, St. Dominic's Road, stands beside a small row of houses in which lived the Daly, Glynn and Curran families. At the left is the gable of Michael Brennan's home and in the background the new estate is already taking shape. (Courtesy Michael Griffin).

The 'Big Grass' (North-western section): White-washed houses, golden thatched roofs and cobbled 'streets' fill this pleasant scene from the Old Claddagh. The Burke family lived in the house on the left and the Barretts in the white gabled building. The three houses in the middle were occupied by the Hynes, O'Donnell and Kelly (later Griffin) families. In the background is the Jordan home with little window in gable. (Courtesy P. J. Scully and Tom Kenny).

The 'Big Grass' (Northern section): Wash day as clothes hang along the white-washed walls to dry in the 'Rope Walk' which ran in a west-east direction through the heart of the Old Claddagh a little to the north of the 'Big Grass'. (Courtesy Ethna Griffin).

The 'Big Grass' (North-eastern section): Cobbled lane leading up from the Rope Walk' towards the top of Dogfish Lane. The homes, from the left, were occupied by the Curran, King, Currran, Noone, Murphy, Jones and Fallon families. The Dominican priory wall and trees are in the background. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Cock rules the Roost: The same lane looking down towards the 'Rope Walk' area. The Noones lived in the house on the right and further down lived the Currans (house is recessed and not visible in this photo). Next were the Kings, and other Currans. Further down lived the McHugh and Hynes families while the horse and cart stand by the gable of the Cubbard household. (Courtesy Ethna Griffin).

The 'Big Grass' (Eastern section) - Dogfish Lane: A famous photograph of Dogfish Lane, published in the *Connacht Tribune* during the 1930s, delineates the eastern end of the 'Big Grass' area, the main section of the Old Claddagh. The Dominican Priory wall is on the left and the houses leading down to the quays were occupied by, from the right, the Hart (a shop), Higgins, Cooke, O'Donnell, O'Connor, Rushe, Concannon and Moore families. (Courtesy *Connacht Tribune* and Tom Kenny).

The 'Big Grass' (South-eastern section): The gable end of the home of Margaret Moore can be seen on the right at the narrow entrance to the bottom of Dogfish Lane. The gables of the Morgans and Carricks extend westwards towards a row of houses belonging to, from the left, the Mullaly, Cloherty, King, McHugh, O'Brien and Belton families. The house on the far left had its thatch removed later and was converted to the Murphy Bakery, complete with tin roof. (Courtesy National Library).

Bottom end of Dogfish Lane: Close-up of the Moore and Concannon houses on the right and the two free-standing homes were occupied by the Olivers and Morgans. The Dominican priory towers over all the littlle homes. (Courtesy Eileen Cloherty).

The Claddagh Bakery: Close-up of the tin-roofed bakery owned by the Murphy family. The house on the left was occupied by Oliver Murphy. Both buildings faced the quays. (Courtesy Eileen Cloherty).

The 'Big Grass' (Southern section): In the distance, from the left, stands the previously mentioned row of houses containing the Wallace, Barrett, Connor, Cooke and Feeney homes fronting on to the 'Big Grass'. The houses of the Folans and Keanes face the camera, while the gables of the Powell, Hart, and Lydon homes extend across to the Oliver (later Lee shop) facing the quays. (Courtesy Ulster Folk & Transport Museum).

Upper Fairhill: The slated roof was rather a rare sight in the Claddagh, and here in Upper Fairhill, it points out the premises of shoemaker, Paddy Lynskey. (Postcard courtesy Jimmy O'Connor).

Lower Fairhill and the *Garra Glas* (*c.* 1890): To the left, Lower Fairhill winds its way down to Dominick Street in the distance. The Hernon and Madden families lived in the houses visible on the left. To the right stands the *Garra Glas* where the firestation is today. The gate of the Domincan cemetery, complete with carved plaques can be seen behind the cart, and the houses from the right belonged to Delia Collins (gable), the Folans (two-storey) and Mannions. Further down beyond the lane leading to Raftery's Woollen Mills lived the Cubbards and Flahertys. (Courtesy National Library).

Four studies of the end of a little corner of the *Garra Glas:* **(a)** The four homes were occupied, from the left, by the Mannion, Folan, Conneely, Nee and Collins families. **(b)** Taking the sun outside Mannions. Notice the Siena tile over the doorway denoting devotion to the name of Jesus. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne). (c) The homes of the Flahertys and Cubbards lead down to Raftery's Woollen Mills. (Courtesy Monica Wallace). **(d)** The end is in sight as Maura Browne, Rita Conneely and Evelyn Riddell gather for one last drink from the pump before the houses were demolished to make way for the fire-station. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne).

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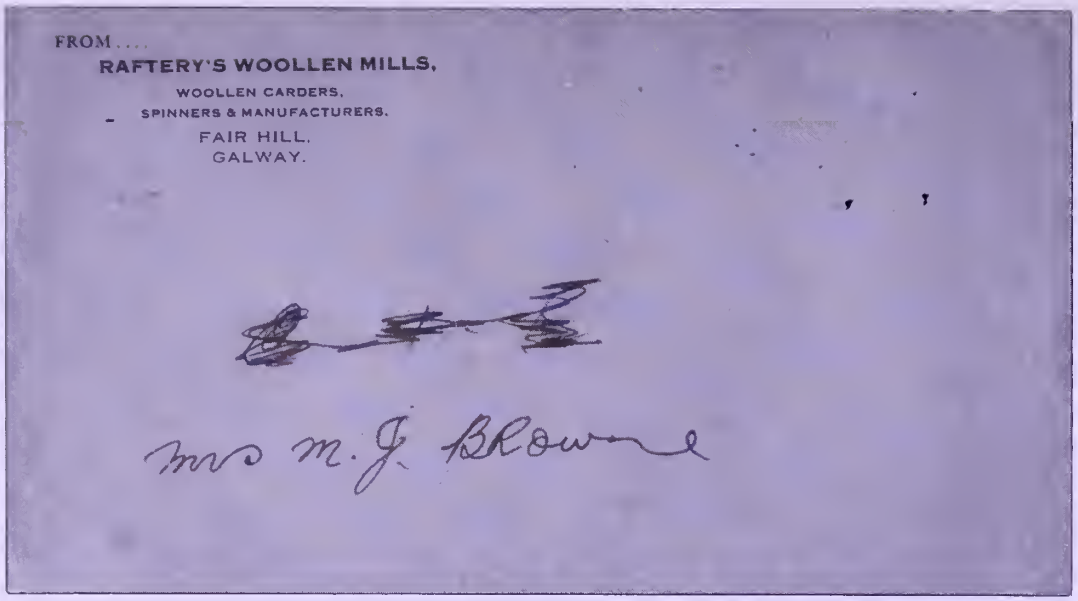


Letter-head from Raftery's Woollen Mills in the Garra Glas off Fairhill: The black mourning shawl was one of the products of this mill. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne).

Claddagh Shop: Maureen Cunningham nee Oliver, on her Confirmation Day, stands in the doorway of her grandmother's shop, Mary Lee's, which faced the quays. (Courtesy Maureen Cunningham).

Re-thatching another Claddagh home: The thatcher was a common sight in the Claddagh. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Winter in the *Garra Glas:* The snow lies thick on both ground and thatch and not a mouse stirs in this delightful scene. The homes of the Flahertys, the Cubbards, the Mannions and the Collins's lie silent beneath the mantle of white in this Christmas card scene. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell).

Summer in the *Garra Glas:* The chimney smoke rises lazily in the Summer air as the villagers relax in the sun outside the gleaming white-washed walls of Rafterys and other *Garra Glas* homes. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell).

Chapter 4

"Out All Night" — The Story of the Claddagh Fishing Fleet

Beginnings

The vast shoals of herring, cod and haddock in the inshore waters of Galway Bay must have been a great temptation to the the early dwellers in the little thatched huts around the Corrib estuary. We can visualise them setting forth in their river logboats eager to harvest this rich food source and experiencing new dangers and difficulties from rolling waves and changing tides. These low, dugout canoes were unsuitable for the task in hand, and a lighter, skin covered craft came into use which was more successful in the prevailing conditions.

Such a craft, although larger and with simple sails of rough spun cloth, brought St. Enda, the patron saint of Aran, to the Maree peninisula in the 5th century. Here, as mentioned previously, a youth from the harbour at the mouth of the River Corrib, presented him with a handful of fresh fish.

Some centuries later, the Norman settlers drew strength from the sea. Larger wooden sailing vessels such as caravels and galleons sailed from the cut-stone quays of medieval Galway to Europe laden with animal produce and salted fish. Smaller inshore craft filled the city's fish market in Fisher's Lane off Back Street (St. Augustine Street) with cod, hake, ling, haddock, mackerel and herring.

It is not known when these early wooden fishing craft came into use but we get a tantalizing glimpse of them in the 1651 Pictorial Map of Galway. Two are depicted at the Claddagh shoreline in the original engraving and, although of timber construction, their design is unclear.

Confirmation that wooden fishing craft were constructed in the Claddagh in the 17th century is provided by Charles Blake-Forster in his book, *The Irish Chieftains or A Struggle for the Crown.* Although compiled in the middle of the 19th century, the writer used ancient Blake papers in researching his work. In dealing with Terryland Castle after the 1691 Williamite siege, he notes:

> *"Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the noontide air, where a few days previously all was animation and military parade, and nought was to be seen but the sturdy fishermen as they removed from among the debris the smouldering remains of the ponderous oak beams which had so recently supported the strong roof of the now dilapidated castle, and bore them away in the direction of the Claddagh, to form parts of the stout boats by which they earned their dangerous and precarious livelihood".*

Claddagh Boat Design

'Dangerous' is the appropriate word here of course, because Galway Bay, although enclosed on three sides by land, is, in fact, a large tract of open water. To the west, the three Aran Islands afford only minimal protection to the inner waters of the bay. Obviously, these small, wooden sailing boats warranted a special design and from countless encounters with Atlantic storms, a concept was born. A design of boat was honed in the minds of master builders and eventually produced the class of sailing boat which became the Claddagh or Galway Hooker craft of today.

Initially, Richard J. Scott in his book, *The Galway Hookers*, pondered a possible Dutch, Norwegian or Spanish ancestry for the Galway boats, while others saw them deriving from Kinsale or Skerries sailing craft. However, as James Hardiman noted the development of such craft from smaller local craft in his *History of Galway*, a point re-echoed in an 1836 Sea Fisheries Inquiry Report, Scott eventually surmises:

> *"..... it is not unreasonable for Galwaymen to lay claim to the hooker as their own, a very special craft tailormade for their waters and to their needs when sail was the principal source of propulsion on their coasts, even if we cannot, with certainty, retrace the steps past the nineteenth century".*

Claddagh Boat Development

Although the precise origin of the distinctive Galway Hooker or *Bád Mór* (Big Boat) and its sister sailing boats is unknown, the reason for their development is not. As the merchant families of the town saw their properties and municipal influences transferred to transplanters after the 17th century sieges, their fishing fleet suffered as a consequence and finally disappeared. The Claddagh suburb became part of the Whaley estate, and its fishermen were free to develop their own fishing boats as best they could.

That they did so is evidenced in a footnote in James Hardiman's *History of Galway.*

> *"In 1762 it appeared in evidence before the Irish house of commons, that in the fishing season about 200 boats are employed in the bay and harbour, of which about 160 belong to the town, and the rest to the county of Clare side of the harbour.....".*

When viewed by Arthur Young in 1780, the Claddagh fishing craft were quite small as he notes:

> *"These boats are from 4 to 6 tons, some 9; they cost in building £20 a boat and the nets and tackle about 15 shillings".*

James Hardiman, writing in 1820, is more specific:

> *"Previously to 1790, the Claddagh fishing-boats were little more than half the size of those used at present . These small craft seldom ventured beyond the Isles of Arran, or more than half an hour's sail from land, but generally coasted along the shores of Conamara, and, on the first appearance of a smart breeze or sudden change of weather, immediately ran for shelter into the next creek or harbour".*

But matters were improving and Hardiman notes the continued development of the distinctive Galway craft:

> *"From that period, however, the fishermen began to build their boats of larger dimensions; the ordinary size of the common sailing-boats at present is from 8 to 10 tons, and some of the largest from 12 to 14. A boat of this description generally costs from £40 to £50 exclusive of nets and fishing implements; and of these, it is said, there are now about 250 belong to the village, besides a great number of small boats impelled by oars".*

As the size of the sailing craft increased, accommodation aboard improved and crews could venture further out to new fishing grounds as well as remaining several days away from home. Catches increased also and another advantage of the larger boats soon became evident. Fresh outlets for their catch enticed some of the fishing crews to sail to new markets far from their beloved Claddagh. Hardiman notes this also:

> *".....the fishermen frequently go round to Limerick, and even more to the southward, laden with fish, and also towards Westport and Sligo on the west; and the dexterity and intrepidity with which this hardy race meet and brave the boisterous element, in which they mostly live, is often surprising".*

By then, the Galway Hooker class of sailing boat was coming into its prime. Although, boat figures vary throughout the 19th century from two hundred and fifty in Hardiman to the hundred and fifty sailing craft reported by Marmion in his work, *History of the Maritime Ports of Ireland* (1860), even the lowest figure represents a huge sailing fleet of fishing boats based in the Claddagh, making it one of the largest fishing centres in Ireland at the time.

Types of Boats and Equipment

It would be wrong, however, to class all the Claddagh boats as Galway Hookers. The Hooker, or *Bád Mór* (Big Boat) applied to the largest of the vessels, up to about 40 feet overall in hull length. Richard Scott describes the typical craft thus:

> *"The large hooker was built of massive construction in 1.25 inch larch planking spiked on 6 x 3 inch sawn oak frames, centred 12 inches amidships, and closer forward. An oak or beech keel, about two-thirds the overall length of the hull, provided the backbone to the framework which was bound above by a beam shelf or stringer 10 x 3 inches, and heavy oak aprons, or deadwoods, fastened at the stem and sternpost by iron dumps. With its false stem piece adding nearly a foot to hull length, the high round bow was evolved in the mists of tradition to counter Irish western seas, though the freeboard aft was surprisingly low especially when loaded".*

The main feature of the Galway Hooker, therefore, was its strong, sharp bow and what Scott describes as an

> *"..... apple-cheeked, buoyant, forequarters,* (and a) *considerable tumple-home or belly* (and a) *a beautiful run starting almost amidships, and sweeping up to the raked transom".*

The transom of the Claddagh boats were usually set at an angle of about thirty-five degrees to allow for greater manoeuvrability compared to forty-five degrees for the turf boats of Connemara. This was of particular importance to the Claddagh fishermen as they rounded Nimmo's Pier, where both wind, tide and river currents often made sailing quite difficult on the last leg of the home voyage.

Mary Banim also comments on the graceful outline of the Claddagh boats:

> *"..... Very old fashioned boats, but of a most graceful build – the keel sharp as razor, the ribs – or 'knees' as a fisherboy told me to call the sides – bowed out almost in the shape of the breast-bone of a water fowl, then sloped in again to the edge of the vessel; the bow, rising high out of the water, and curving up a little in front, gives a picturesque appearance to the boat, which seems to ride on the waves with the ease and buoyancy of a bird. The fishermen say that the bowing out of the 'knees' gives greater steadiness and security: certainly the vessel can go through the water at a flying speed".*

Although, the Hooker shimmered in its blackness from the tarred timbers of its hull, blackened by a kind of emulsion of creosote and coal, a most distinguishing feature was its set of sails. The standard rigging consisted of three brown sails, the main sail and the foresail on either side of the main mast and a jib sail extended beyond the bow by a bowsprit. A gaff or wooden bar carried the mainsail at a proud angle high above the deck. The total area of all the sails was about 900 square feet (for the larger boats) and was made locally from calico while Terylene is used today. Rather surprisingly, the floor areas of the Dominican Church and even Galway Courthouse were used on occasions to lay out sails at six pence a time.

Local correspondent, Cormac MacConnell, writing in an *Irish Independent* Supplement of the 27th October, 1990, describes the old-style sails thus:

> *"The calico sails of the turning century were only loosely woven. In the summer, dried out, they would let more wind pass through than they would hold. So the distinctive gaff rig was smeared with rancid butter, coming up on her down-wind was a nose-wrinkling exercise".*

The accommodation and storage areas differed slightly from boat to boat. Some were half-decked from the bow to the mast, at an extra cost of £10 in the 1830's, under which a small cabin offered a little shelter from the elements. The open boats offered no protection from angry seas and soaking winds, however, and, according to the 1836 *Report of the Commission into the State of Irish Fisheries*, were responsible for much of the illness and sickness prevalent among the fishermen at the time.

Cooking facilities were rough and simple and consisted of an open fire set on a stone hearth and, according to Hardiman:

> *"The men carry in their boats some potatoes, oaten-cakes, fire and water, but never admit any spirituous liquor".*

Cooking in such cramped conditions must have been quite difficult and led Cormac MacConnell to write:

> *"Then there was the smokiness of the turf fires that burned on the cutstone hearth in the wet cabins, often turning the crewmen five or six shades of black to blacker".*

Specially chosen stones were also used as ballast in the main hold, which sometimes gave the name of *Balaistí* to the boat.

A smaller version of the Claddagh Hooker was called the *Leath Bhád* (Half Boat), a rather deceptive term as the craft usually measured about 32 feet in length. A smaller model again of about 24-28 feet, was called a *Gleóiteog*, a word possibly derived from *gleóite*' meaning nice or pretty. Most boats were of this class, as they were cheaper to build (and buy) and most of the sailing craft now enjoying a revival in the Claddagh are of this type.

Usually similiar in size and shape, the *Púcán* (no real meaning in English), is the last of the four types of Claddagh sailing craft and is easily distinguished from the rest when under sail. As well as the gib sail, only one large sail straddled the mast, which, depending on wind direction, could be swung around it only by the most expert of *bádóirí* or boatmen.

Fishing Methods and Tackle

These, then, were the local sailing craft, and backed up by thick timbered wooden rowing boats, helped bring prosperity to the Claddagh in the early part of the 19th century. As mentioned previously, the fishing methods employed included drift net fishing for herring and long lining with baits for other species. Because of the small size of the craft, however, trawling was not feasible, a fact which helped fuel opposition by the Claddagh fishermen to the introduction of the trawlers during the 19th century.

The tackle used by the fishermen was primitive by modern standards. Dutton described the nets as being made from hemp, tanned with oak bark. Nets were also made from flax, but lasted only a short time when water-proofed with tar, a process which also tended to scare away the fish! Consequently, net mending was a common activity in the old village as Hardiman observes:

> *"When on shore, they* (the fishermen) *are principally employed in attending to, and repairing their boats, sails, rigging, cordage, &c. and in making, drying, or repairing their nets and spillets, in which latter employment they are generally assisted by the women, who spin the hemp and yarn for the nets."*

In 1830, according to the 11th Report of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries, one hundred people were classed as net makers in the Claddagh.

Henry Inglis comments on this home industry also:

> *"This is an industrious people. I went into, and looked into, hundred of cabins; and there was scarcely one in which I did not see the females busily engaged in spinning, making or mending nets. These they make not only for use, but for sale. The profit, however, is small. To spin and make a net, requires from eight to ten days; the price of the material is 4s., and it sells for 5s.; so that it is hard work to make a shilling a week by this trade".*

How hard the work was can be seen when one realises that a shilling at the time would only purchase a pound of butter or two pounds of mutton!

There were different types of nets and for herring fishing, two mesh sizes were utilised. For Winter and early Spring fishing, a large mesh of a hand space was used, but for the late Summer and Autumn netting, a smaller mesh, about the size of an old halfpenny, was needed to cater for the varying sizes of the herring .

According to Dutton, the usual method of fishing, "*is to let down the nets and the fish mesh themselves*". The nets, usually four fathoms (24 feet) deep, were normally set at night for herring, and raised in the morning light.

The other fishing method employed was by long line, and a hand line or spillet would cost the fisherman about three shillings from the rope makers in Galway although some made their own. The hand lines used by the Claddagh fishermen, however, were very primitive, a point emphasised in 1840 by Robert Allen writing under the pen name of 'A Cosmopolite'. In a summary of his views, Prof. Gearóid O Tuathaigh in the work, *Galway: Town and Gown* stated:

> "*He* (Allen) *believed the Claddagh men were using coarse tackle in Galway Bay (not suited to catching cod, ling or turbot); that they had heavy hemp lines for mackerel (instead of good twisted gut); that they had common tarred string rather than gut for catching whiting.....*".

Hooks were also quite dear, costing in the region of £2 per 300 on a spillet, and so there was a constant need to conserve and repair gear. Thus, lines as well as ropes were continually being stretched and repaired especially in the long, clear area of the Rope Walk and in The Big Grass between the village and the shore.

Bait Gathering

Bait consisted mainly of lug worm and 19th century writers commented that only women and children participated in the gathering process. Hardiman notes this also:

> "*When preparing for sea, hundreds of their women and children for some days before* (the boats set sail) *crowd the neighbouring strands, digging for worms to bait the hooks.*"

Dutton also refers to this strange sight:

> "*..... preparatory to which,* (setting out to fish) *the strand is covered in every direction with their wives and children procuring bait of many sorts, but mostly what are called lugs, the same name used in Fingal*".

The strand in question, was mostly centred around the large inlet enclosed by the rough roadway leading from Fair Hill down to Rintinanne Point on which Alexander Nimmo erected the top portion of his 'Slate' pier. This inlet was subsequently filled in and became South Park. Its old name, 'The Swamp', still used by old Galwegians today, refers back to the time before Nimmo's 'Slate' Pier was extended to the 'Bankeen' Pier at the Claddagh Hall and cut off tidal waters from entering the inlet.

With the closing off of the sea inlet by the extension of Nimmo's Pier back to the Claddagh and the erection of stone piers and quays along what was once a sandy and stony beach in the 1830's, the women had to look elsewhere for spillet bait. They hadn't far to go,

however, because practically every rock along the open seashore was covered with mussels, which could be collected during 'a big strand', when the tide was at its lowest point.

Thousands of these shellfish were collected at a time by the Claddagh women until the demolition of the village in the 1930s, as recorded by Marie Carpenter in an RTC Secretarial Studies project submitted in 1983:

> *"Most of the fishing was done by hand lines. Each line contained many hooks, which were baited, and this took hours of work. This work was usually done by the women of the village. They went to the strand and collected the mussels. They then sat outside their houses preparing the baits for the following day's fishing. To this day, piles of mussel shells, which were thrown back into the sea, can be seen at low tide adjacent to the quay wall".*

This information was got from her uncle, Martin Connolly, a former mayor of Galway, who recently restored and sailed the *gleóiteog, The Claddagh Lass*. The vast banks of empty mussel shells have since been removed during recent mud clearing work near the Claddagh Hall.

Setting out to Fish

The main fishing was for herring, however, and at the start of the herring season, the old traditional Blessing of the Bay by the Dominicans took place. After much preparation and only when conditions were right, would the king of the Claddagh finally give the order to sail. He led the way, of course, and woe betide anyone who broke the ancient rules of fishing as Hardiman points out:

> *"On the appointed day all the boats round the bay (which generally muster about 500 large and small,) rendezvous at the* (Claddagh) *quay, and, upon a signal given all sail out at once in regular order. The beauty of this sight is inconceivable, and when viewed from one of the heights about the town, is perhaps one of the most gratifying that can be well imagined. When they arrive at the 'fishing grounds' another signal is given by the 'admiral; the nets are instantly set, and every boat is then left at liberty to make the best use of its time. When the great shoal of herrings arrives, it is observed that, in order to spawn, they separate into several smaller sculls, which fill all the creeks and harbours; here they are followed by the fishermen and taken".*

One can imagine the excitement then, as each boat went about its business. Eyes scanned the seas for signs of herring. Diving birds gave some clue but the sound of the *cragán*, the ancient custom of hitting the sides of the boats with stones to make the banks of herring turn was a favourite method of discovery. The slipping of the nets or the lowering of the special anchor stones simply added to the adrenalin flow. The waiting was unbearable but eventually the time came to haul a silver harvest from the greenest seas off Ireland.

If the catch was good, all hands were needed to pull up the heavy net for there are no net winches on the Claddagh Hookers. The strain was immense as the nets, web like and wet with herring, slowly crept across the black, heaving sides. Gradually, the open holds filled with silver fish. The work of removing them from tangled meshes was the final task as the

old boats finally turned in the wind and set their bows towards Mutton Island at the end of the bay.

Fish Catches

Catches, of course, varied from time to time and therein lay the cause of the demise of the Claddagh fishing fleet. Initially, fishing off the Irish coast yielded high returns to both foreign and Irish fishermen until, as John de Courcy Ireland in his book, *Ireland's Sea Fisheries – A History*, (1981) writes:

> *"There seems every reason to suppose that Irish sea fisheries were reaching an unprecedented level of prosperity when the sixteenth-century Tudor conquest altered the whole trend of Irish economic development, reducing our island, which had slowly been emerging towards nationhood, to the status of a colony".*

However, fishing continued along the western shoreline as Roderick O'Flaherty mentioned the traditional cod bank fishing in his 1684 work "*H-Iar Connaught*" . There are also Corporation references to the Galway fishermen's guild which, according to de Courcy Ireland, was:

> *"still operating at least as late as 1619, so its members can safely be assumed to have been catching fish throughout the sixteenth century".*

Catches must have been quite substantial then, but began to decline after 1627 when extra taxes were imposed on fish exports from Ireland. They ceased entirely for short periods in the aftermath of both the Cromwellian siege of 1651-2 and the Williamite attack on the city in 1691.

As the new century dawned, however, most of the former merchant families of Galway had departed and the fishing industry slowly re-established itself in the spreading Claddagh village across the Corrib River. The alarms of war and strife receeded and thoughts turned again to harvesting the rich waters of Galway Bay. From Hardiman we learn that:

> *"The year 1701 was rendered memorable for the great shoals of herrings which were taken in the bay, although only seventy fishing-boats were employed during the season. On the night of the 15th of September they amounted to 1000 barrels, which were sold for 4s. 6d. and, at the end of that and the following year, for 8d. a thousand. Codd was also taken in such quantities, though at an unusual season, that the best was sold for a penny, and, in 1703, for a halfpenny a piece".*

Herring and cod are again mentioned in an 1762 Inquiry before the Irish House of Commons as reported by Hardiman:

> *"The fishery in the harbour and bay of Galway is remarkably good, that there is the best herring and cod fishery there in the kingdom, and a cod-bank neary Bophin, about a night's draft from the shore. The bay of Galway on the outside of Arran Isles is remarkable for sun-fish (basking shark), which are there in plenty, and of such value that if a boat be out for two months, and takes one sun-fish, the owners think themselves repaid. The fishermen of Galway supply the city of Limerick with sea-fish and a great part of the inland county".*

In 1780, Arthur Young sheds more light on the catches of the Galway boats employed in the Spring fishery for cod, hake, mackerel, etc. Although he noted a decrease in the amount of fish taken "*these 15 years*", nevertheless, 5,000 fish was described "*as being a middling night's catch*", which were subsequently sold for 1s. 4d. to 2s. 2d. a hundred.

Claddagh Fishing at its Height

We are indebted to James Hardiman, however, for providing valuable information on fish catches by the Claddagh fishermen at the start of the 19th century, when, perhaps, the Claddagh was enjoying its most successful period in its long fishing history. From his pen we learn that:

> *"..... a great quantity and variety of fish are taken in the bay; amongst which the following are to be had daily in the public market, during their proper seasons, viz. herrings in great quantities, turbot of the largest and finest kind, sole, plaice, cod, haddock, hake, whiting, ling, mullet, black and white pollock, mackrel, bream, eel, gurnet, and several other varieties, with abundance of lobsters, crabs, cray-fish, oysters, shrimps, cockles, muscles &c. and at very reasonable prices".*

He then devotes a section of his book to the herring fishery in Galway Bay noting in particular that it was the most valuable on the coast and that the vast shoals taken annually were astonishing. Not only that:

> *"The herrings are larger and esteemed of a much better quality than those taken on the coasts of Scotland, but that industrious nation far exceeds us in curing and saving the fish. On the commencement of the season, vessels from England, Scotland, and many parts even of Ireland, attend in the different creeks and harbours of the bay, and purchase the fresh fish, which is immediately cured and prepared for exportation".*

Dutton describes how a single rowing boat could often return with a catch of 20,000 herrings in one night's work. In the subsequent *Report of the Commission into the State of Irish Fisheries, 1836*, it is reported that an average night's catch for each boat was 10,000 herrings. It even mentions that a Claddagh man by the name of Seán Mac an Ríogh once landed 40,000 herrings in one haul!

The herring season through Autumn and Winter was only part of the Galway Bay fishery of the time, however, and Hardiman also devotes a section of his work to sun-fish, cod and turbot fishing also. He mentions in particular, *"the valuable turbot-bank lately discovered"* which made the fish not only cheap and plentiful in the town, but local fish merchants were able to supply great quantities to several parts of the country as well as by mail coach to the Dublin markets. Lobsters too were plentiful and often made five shillings per dozen!

A Leading Fishery

All of this made Galway one of the leading fishery stations in the country. According to Hardiman, very few places in the 1820s were better supplied with every species of fish than Galway, which, with its other local advantages, rendered it one of the cheapest towns in the land. Census figures taken from the 10th Report of the Commissioners of the Irish Fishery Office for 1829 seemed to confirm this.

In the Galway district, including the Claddagh, although the number of decked vessels totalled only 12 (59 hands) and half-decked vessels 6 (30 hands) the total number of open sail vessels was returned at 484 with 2,420 hands, the largest in the land. Row boats totalled 1,199 with 4,796 hands, giving an overall total of 7,305 fishermen employed in the industry. On shore there were 23 curing houses employing 304 men, while 460 people were employed in gutting and packing the catch. In all, 27 coopers made barrels for the fishing industry, 4 made sails and 600 made nets, giving a grand total of 8,700 persons involved in the fishing industry in the Galway district.

Decline and Defiance

At first sight, these 1829 statistics of the fishing industry in the Galway district suggest a vibrant economy based on the successful harvesting of the seas. Nothing could be further from the truth however, because already the ancient way of fishing was in decline. The seeds of destruction were sown as far back as 1738 with the introduction of the 'trailing net' to the Irish coast. The ever increasing catches from improved methods of trawling by sail and later steam trawlers finally told against the Claddagh fishermen who could not or would not change their old traditional ways of fishing.

Hardiman was one of the first to comment on this negative side of the Claddagh fishermen:

> *".....though they sometimes exhibit a great shew of industry, they are still so wedded to old customs, that they invariably reject, with the most inveterate prejudice, any new improvement in their fishing apparatus, which is consequently now very little superior to that used centuries ago by their ancestors. The consequence of this is that the great mass of wealth which here lies engulfed in the bosom of the deep has been hitherto but partially explored; and the riches which yearly flow into this extensive inlet of the ocean are suffered again to depart, through the indolence, and sometimes superstitious prejudices, of this otherwise useful and meritorious body of men. When they do not themselves think proper to fish, they invariably prevent every other from attempting it....."*.

He then goes on to describe how a number of local gentlemen (led by Captain Morris, commander of the *Townsend* revenue cruiser) tried to introduce trawling for turbot in the bay in 1811 but the Claddagh fishermen eventually attacked their boats and destroyed their equipment. To the native fishermen, trawling disturbed the spawning of the fish on the seabed and frightened the great shoals away from their beloved Galway Bay.

Experts came and tried to explain the various benefits of trawling at various Fishery Inquiries such as the one held in 1836 but to no avail. In 1833, the Dominican Fathers, led by Fr. Patrick Hughes, tried to entice them to adopt the new methods, but without success. Their opposition to trawling 'on their bay' grew stronger and, according to local lore, when one of Galway's leading business men, Lachlan MacLachlan, introduced a trawler to the waters off Mutton Island, it mysteriously sank after berthing.

An editorial in the *Galway Vindicator* of 21st October, 1863, points out that lawless acts would bring down punishment and deprivations upon them. It also states that in the opinion of those who studied the matter attentively, trawling a long distance from the shore, would not interfere with their fishing or fish stocks.

The Case Against Trawlers

By 1876, however, *The Galway Vindicator* had changed its attitude and championed the fishermens' cause in a whole series of editorials and reports in subsequent years. In its 16th September, 1876, edition under the headline, THE CLADDAGH – MR. BRADY'S PROJECT, it comments:

> *"A great deal has been written on this subject. We, ourselves, devoted considerable time to aid in the philanthropic attempt made by Mr. Brady, Inspector of Fisheries, to improve the condition of the poor Claddagh Fishermen and we were most sanguine that the results would be satisfactory. For months back, however, we heard nothing of the matter whatever, beyond the vague rumour that the Claddaghmen would not accept the proffered bounty of Mr. Brady. It was said that Mr. Brady had had a formal meeting with the Claddaghmen, that written conditions were submitted, and a written reply delivered, and that there was an end of the negotiations".*

The editorial continues with a letter from Mr. Brady to *The Times* outlining the visit he made to the Claddagh fishermen, accompanied as he was by 'two county gentlemen'.While the *Vindicator* writer admits the conditions laid down for aiding the fishermen by Mr. Brady were good, he concludes:

> *"As to the Claddagh, Mr. Brady has simply made a mistake in negotiating with the poor people. They did not thoroughly understand him. If he would kindly come again, and let us know when he does come, we would engage to have gentlemen present at the interview, who would act matters to right – a consummation which, we have no doubt, would be pleasing to Mr. Brady as it would be beneficial to the poor Cladddagh Fishermen".*

This, seemingly, did not occur and in the 6th November, 1880, edition of the newspaper the following dramatic report appears:

> *"Some few weeks ago, the town was startled by the attendance in a body of the entire Claddagh population at the Friday meeting of the Poor Law Board, to tell their story ' .....that the trawlers had destroyed their industry – destroyed the fish of the bay – destroyed their living..... Some twelve years ago the same question was raised, and evidence take in the Courthouse by the fishery inspectors. The difficulty on every side was reliable evidence. On behalf of the line fishers it was advanced that the trawlers dragged their trawl-booms over the spawn beds in the shallow bay of Galway, crushed much of the deposited ova, exposed the rest to be ate up, and by their untimely disturbance thereby reducing the crop of the future. 2. That the trawl bags took up quantities of spawn to its destruction. 3. That the trawl-bags took up much young fish, killing them by the pressure in the heavy bags of the trawlers to the destruction of the future crop. 4. Finally, that they could neither shoot their lines in safety, or their herring or other nets as the trawlers paid them no respect, but ran through them, dragging them away or into entanglement; that their vocation could not be followed".*

The answer of the trawlermen, according to the report, was a simple denial of each and all of the fishermen claims. The Fishery Commissioners then obtained power, according to the report, to select men of the Coastguard to accompany the trawlers and to *"report to them*

the facts offered to these seamens observations at the lifting of the trawl-bags when following the process of fishing complained of".

The Coastguards' report was never made public, but the final outcome was the admission of trawling into the very shallows of the bay. The *Vindicator* was furious in its comments at this, stating that its was not aware if any 'Naturalist' was consulted. Later, that year, when a Memorial to the Central Government Board on behalf of the fishermen was turned down, one can imagine the despair that gripped the Claddagh.

By 1886 however, the Vindicator was in a more optimistic mood as the editorial of its 20th February edition reports:

> *"The two smacks now nearly completed for the Claddagh which are being built at the instance of the Most. Rev. Dr. Carr, Lord Bishop of Galway, and Mr. Brady, Inspector of Fisheries, are to cost £700 each, and are to be manned, each by a Captain and seven men. We mention this, as a guide to clergymen or gentlemen who may assist in ameliorating the condition of our fishermen by organizing crews and getting boats built and fitted out for the mackerel and deep sea fishing. We do hope sincerely that advantage will be taken of the new Loan System and that our own poverty stricken fishermen will participate in the teeming wealth that the deep seas around our coast supply to the fishermen of other countries".*

However, the same editorial rather sadly concludes:

> *"But our Claddagh fishermen, at least a large number of them, will continue to ply the hook and line, as their forefathers did for centuries in Galway Bay".*

The newpaper was not too pessimistic in its edition of the following week when it reported that "*the reply of the Chief Secretary To Major Nolan on Monday night in the House of Commons would appear, at first blush, to be very unfavourable to the Claddaghmen who believe that trawling in the Bay is injurious to the fishing with hook and line.....*". It continued:

> *"As Captain O'Shea (M.P. for the Borough) has so kindly promised to take this question up in the interest of the Claddaghmen, we would ask him, notwithstanding the reply of the Chief Secretary, to persevere".*

His efforts over the following period, and those of the fishermen, supported by the clergy, gentry, and merchant traders of the town in an Appeal against trawling in Galway Bay at a Judicial Committee of the Privy Council Hearing in Dublin Castle in February, 1889, were but some of the unsuccessful attempts made to help promote the Claddagh fishery.

As more trawlers began to operate on the bay during the following years, defiance turned to despair in the Claddagh heart. Their sentiments of what was happening are recorded by Mary Banim when she recorded the following comments from Mrs. Padge King, the Queen of the Claddagh in 1892:

> *"But there's no law for the poor now. The poor man has few friends. Once the bay as far as the Arran Isles belonged to the fishermen of the Claddagh, of Oran, an' the other people along the coasts; but the rich came in and drove the fish away, an' now, I've seen the strong men weak for want of food, an' the little children white with cold*

an' hunger. All the young men of the Claddagh has been forced to enter the Navy Reserve, to try an' keep a roof over their people: an' if ever war comes, then God be with us all!".

These sentiments, of course, echoed the feelings of the other women of the Claddagh, who saw at first hand the results of the decline in the fish catches of their men, who strove even harder to fill their weekly quotas against the might of the trawlers. The views of the fishermen, as expounded by Padge King, were also recorded by Mary Banim:

"She says true', interposed Padge King, 'landsfolk can't always understand why we are so bitter set against the trawlers. They think the sea in beside the land is the same that it is a hundred miles out – all deep, an' the fish all a fair take for large an' small craft. But it's no such thing. Here's how it is. Galway Bay is only like a shallow, sandy-bottomed pond. Very well. Us, with our wide mesh nets, just caught the fish – the large, full-grown herrings of the season. The trawlers – there's eleven of 'em out there, their beams pointed at us like bayonets! – the trawlers come into the shallow seas, with nets of big and little meshes kept to the bottom of the bay with great bars that sweeps – sweeps along, and gathers up all before them, – fish, old and young, and sand. Now, mind you, the sand is (or used to be) weighted with the spawn for the next year. But the trawl sweeps up all. Why, I have seen shoals of young fish poured – a dead stream – back again into the sea from the trawlers' nets: what should be a stream of silver for the poor fisherman next year an' the years to come, lost an' useless! An', then, here's worse again. The Almighty gives great sense to all creatures for their own protection, and fish have a high sense of what is destruction to their kind. The trawl bars ever an' always disturbing the bottom of the bay, the herrings, that used to come in millions, soon began to desert it and turn elsewhere for shelter, so it comes that every way our small craft has little or no chance where the big boats of the wealthy company can sweep all before 'em. An' so it is that there's poverty now in the Claddagh. We ask only fair play. Let us have a matter of ten miles of our own bay – from Blackhead into Galway – free to our craft, and no trawler allowed inside that line. Let us have that for even five years, and see will the fish return to our coast. God knows the rest is wide enough for all – rich and poor!"

Nevertheless, it was only at the Fishery Inquiry in 1897 that trawler owners eventually agreed to stay, each January to March, outside a line from Glenina Castle (near Black Head in County Clare) to Furbo. The damage to the fishery, as far as the Claddagh fishermen were concerned, however, was already done. One of their most impassioned speakers pointed out that only a quarter of the original number of Claddagh fishermen still operated in the bay, of how gear was damaged by trawling and clearly identified the dreadful decline of fish stocks in the home waters as resulting from the operation of the trawlers.

Perhaps, the most telling fact to emerge from the inquiry, however, was that by 1897, thirty-three trawlers, some of the 40-70 beam trawling class, were already operating in the bay. Ever since the London and West of Ireland Fishing Company commenced trawling on a large scale in the 1850s, the smaller Claddagh vessels could not compete commercially against the bigger boats of a company which, according to John de Courcy Ireland:

".....was about to invest £30,000 for the development of Galway Bay fisheries, using vessels of 75-80 tons, long-liners, 30-35 foot row-boats for seining, a steam schooner for transporting fish, a curing station, a smoking house, a fish-oil works and ice-houses".

Difficulties of a Multi-Fishery

The combining of major sections of the fishing process into a single viable, private company showed how the fishing industry should be organised. The Claddagh fishery was not a single entity however, and its ancient rules were not designed to cater for modern economic realities. Co-ordination of resources, both on land and sea, was not possible in a fishery comprised of so many minor individual boat owners, who fished only for themselves, depended solely on a variable catch for revenue and, subsequently, had extreme difficulty in getting capital for their fishing operations as well as a steady market for their produce.

A translation from Domhnall Ó Caoimh's article, *Cladach na Gaillimhe, 1800-1850*, in Vol. V1 (1959) of Galvia (*Irisleabhar Chumann Seandáluíochta is Staire na Gaillimhe*) summarizes this important aspect of the problems facing the Claddagh fishing community:

"The fishermen were always poor. They did not have wealth and because of this they lived from day to day. They found it difficult to provide for the bad year, and if it came, they were destroyed because they found it difficult to repair nets and boats, or to substitute them if they lost them, so as to be ready to fish the following year. It often happened that a fisherman was not able to commence fishing at the start of the season because his gear was pawned the previous year. It was said during the Commission (1836) that fishermen found it difficult to get credit to buy gear, and if they got it, they had to pay two shillings in the £ as interest. At the time of the Commission, there was a debt of £12,000 on the fishermen of the Claddagh for ropes, goods, etc..... ".

The article also explains in detail the problems encountered in disposal of the catches. Obviously, when catches were poor, the fishermen often suffered financial hardship and many had to pawn their gear in order to survive. As fish stocks in the bay declined due to trawling activities later in the century, the reduction in the average catch by Claddagh fishermen led eventually to many selling their boats to buyers in the town or in Connemara and emigrating.

Surprisingly, when catches were good, problems also existed for the unfortunate fishermen. Initially, these centred on the fact that their produce, especially herring and mackerel, were perishable commodities unless used immediately after netting. While their main sales area was the home markets on the quays of Galway, in times of oversupply, the price of fish fell drastically. The laws of supply and demand were applied vigorously by local buyers, usually to the detriment of the fishermen.

This, it seems, led to some conflict among the Claddagh men at times, especially when they berthed in the Long Walk area and found little demand for their catches after spending days at sea. No contracts or fixed price agreements existed between them and the dealers, and, according to the 1836 Commission Report, prices ranged from £2 per thousand at the

start of the herring season to as low as ten shillings in times of surplus. The Report estimated the annual average fishing landings amounted to £40,000.

In the earlier part of the century, foreign boats from England and Scotland, *"attend in the creeks and harbours of the bay"* according to Hardiman, and paid the fishermen for their herring catches which were immediately cured and prepared for export.

Later, in their absence, local fish curers paid even less. Rock salt was used for curing purposes and in times of high demand the price soared from four shillings to £7 a ton for salt. This was often too high a price for individual boat owners who wished to salt their fish. They had no option then but to allow their catches to be sold for use as farm fertlilizer or rely on the whims of the fish curers, who usually paid eight shillings per 1,000 herrings compared to ten shillings from buyers in times of a market glut.

During 1836, according to Ó Caoimh, twenty-eight million herrings out of a catch of eighty-five million, were salted in the Galway district, roughly a third of the total catch. Unfortunately, most of the herrings were cured in bulk, and the recommended way of cleaning the fish individually before salting was not normally carried out. This led to less demand for the Galway herrings on the open market and the number of major fish curers (40 in 1836) had dropped to just one, Thomas Wade, according to *Slator's Directory* of 1856.

As with the fishermens' pleas for capital for boats and a ban on trawling, their requests for a proper state-run curing station in the harbour area went unheeded. Taken together with the lack of an over-all fishing development plan and in the face of competition from well funded private fishing firms, the Claddagh fishery gradually declined and became part of the history and folklore of the West.

Fault with The Claddagh According to Others

To many observors from the outside, the Claddagh community had only itself to blame for the failure of its fishery. Dutton, mentions this but does underline the lack of capital as being a contributory cause:

> *"The herring fishery is not carried on to that extent that it ought, and in general is greatly mismanaged; there is almost always something wrong or wanting. At one time there is a want of salt to meet an extraordinary take of this valuable fish; at other times the nets are out of order or the boats are leaky, and a variety of other circumstances, proceeding often more from want of capital than good management or industry".*

This rather jaundiced way of looking at the Claddagh fishery demise is also evident in the following excerpt from *The Illustrated London News* of July 16, 1870:

> *"..... Before the famine of 1846 it* (the Claddagh) *counted over 3,000 stalwart fishermen, who, today, are reduced to 200, including even the aged and decrepit. Even since the famine, these people have been always poor, spending their lifes half in and half out of the workhouse, no matter how abundant may have been the take of fish at certain times. A fortnight's scarcity of fish, or bad weather, with no other resource to*

fall back upon sent their nets and lines, as a matter of course, to the pawnshop, only to be redeemed again with great difficulty. The state of distress to which, for some years past, the Claddagh people have been reduced has arisen principally from the almost total disappearance of the herring, which has been found in abundance in Galway Bay for many years. This, coupled with the prevailing ignorance, a strong prejudice against improved modes of fishing, and a tenacity in clinging to absurd old customs regarding time, place, and order of fishing, is thought to the cause of the community's decay".

Devastating Effect

All of this decay had a devastating effect on the Claddagh, both on the physical appearance of the village and on the morale of the younger generation of fishermen. It became increasingly difficult to earn a living wage from the waters of Galway Bay and many of the younger men sought work elsewhere and emigrated. The same edition of *The Illustrated London Times* shows that the process of depopulation had already started by 1870:

"Latterly, moreover, most of the young and able-bodied have emigrated to the United States, so that the present male populaton consists, for the most part, of mere youths and men long past middle age".

This, of course, had reprecussions on the size of the Claddagh fleet of fishing boats. With the young men emigrating in ever increasing numbers, there was less demand for new boats and the Claddagh gradually ceased to be the main boat-building centre in the West. The great days of the 1830s when twelve boatwrights were kept busy in the village earning three shillings a day and *"three glasses of whiskey"* to *"help them in their work"* were over. The 1835 output of 20 boats was now just a memory.

The Illustrated News continues its sad account:

In the Claddagh there were formerly between 100 and 150 boats of the large hooker class, half decked and of about 15 tons burden besides a vast number of smaller vessels termed 'pookauns'. In many instances the former were sold to strangers, under the pressure of distress, for a nominal sum and in others, when the crews (generally all members of one family) were broken up, through death or emigration on the part of some of their members, the boats were allowed either to rot unclaimed on the beach or else were broken up for fuel".

The remaining fishermen sought other ways to supplement their falling incomes and some looked to the transport of seaweed and turf as means to this end. *The London Illustrated Times* notes this also:

"At the present time, the deep seaweed fishing seems principally to engage the attention of the Claddagh men. The quays are frequently strewn from one end to the other with piles of seaweed landed from the boats. It is conveyed away in carts and sold to manufacturers of kelp, from which iodine bromine and various chemical salts are produced".

Thus, in this brief excerpt from a newspaper of the time, we get a summary of the demise of the Claddagh as a major fishing village. Nevertheless, despite the opposition from trawlers and the lack of capital, fishing did continue there but on an ever decreasing scale.

The End of Large Scale Commercial Fishing

As the 20th century dawned, fishing still played a part, although a diminishing one, in the life of the Claddagh. In the 1901 census, 73 out of 738 inhabitants of the Claddagh described themselves as fishermen, with 15 living in Dogfish Lane, adjacent to the quays. About that time also, only three boat builders, Seán Rainey, Seán O'Donnell and Seán Cloherty, carried on the trade, which finished when Seán Rainey built the last Claddagh fishing hooker named the *Truelight*, on the Long Walk beside the Spanish Arch in 1920. Owned by one of the few remaining fisherman, Martin Oliver, she was the last large Claddagh Hooker to leave the village in 1959.

By the start of the 1920s great changes had taken place. Many of the younger generation of Claddagh men still worked at sea, but had swapped the hard life of the fisherman for the exciting, and more remunerative one as sailors in the British navy. Others had joined the British army or emigrated to America. Later still, some worked as deckhands on new steam trawlers owned by well-known public figure, Maggie Anne Ashe, and other local business people such as shop owner, Sarah Curran, who owned the trawler *Melrose*.

A few, however, still fished the old traditional way from ageing Hookers and Púcáns, many of which were owned by business people such as Peter Greene, whose pub beside the Spanish Arch was a favourite haunt of the fishermen or by the Ruane brothers, nearby fish curers. More and more of the catches had to be shared with these boat owners, and as profits fell in competition with the trawlers, the fishing trips gradually dwindled.

The fishing returns from the traditional craft continued to decline and Harold Speakman in his book, *Here's Ireland*, published in 1925, shows how low they had already reached. He met a local man at the Claddagh Basin who explained the situation:

> *"You hear about the fishermens' calling and their romantic life and all that; well, five of those men go out together in a boat and work all night. The best catch they made any night last week netted them 15 s. per boat to be divided among the five..... A man doesn't require too much wealth of course, but....."*.

The Connacht Sentinel reflected the gathering gloom in its edition of December 12th, 1930 when it published this statement by John Connolly of the Urban District Council:

> *"Conditions in the Claddagh in so far as its capacity to earn money could not be worse than they are at present. I remember when 60-80 fishing smacks were in the Claddagh fleet. Today, only 6 or 8 are operating"*.

He went on to blame the activities of the *Sea Fisheries Association* trawlers for causing the Winter herring shoals to scatter deeper and further out than ever before. His words had a familiar ring to them, and were a final vindication of the fears first uttered by the Claddagh fishermen a century before.

Worse was to follow. Soon, afterwards, the old fish market on 'The Concrete' at the Spanish Arch lost its appeal as new fish counters were installed in city centre shops. Vast quantities of fish caught by trawlers miles from Galway Bay and later displayed on gleaming marble tops became a more attractive prospect to the buyer both from the point of view of price and presentation. The amount of fish caught by the new steam trawlers is well illustrated by a short report in the October 16th edition of *The Connacht Sentinel* of 1928 which states that "*John Summers trawler landed 40,000 herrings last week*".

Sadly, these lower prices resulting from larger and more regular trawler catches killed the last flickerings of enterprise among the Claddagh fishermen. Whereas herrings were sold in the shops at two old pence each to the housewife, the fishermen were paid only four shillings (48 old pence) per 120 fish. The larger trawler combines could compete at these prices but not the smaller individual owners of the Claddagh fleet. One by one, the old boats were tied up, never to fish commercially again.

The tired old vessels were left to moulder away between the tides or were sold to Connemara seafarers who found the wide tumblehomes or bellies of the old craft ideal means to carry turf to Kinvara or seaweed to the docks in Galway. One can imagine the thoughts of the old Claddagh fishermen as they wandered down to Nimmo's Pier to view the familiar boats pulled alongside awaiting rising tides. The silver gleam of herring was just a memory as the holds brimmed with the brownest seaweeds or *feamainn* one would wish to see. Each boatload fetched £10 from nearby dealers Colie McDonagh or Delia Lydon, before the brown sails creeked again and bows braced Atlantic swells on the long voyage to new homes in the west.

Martin Oliver still fished from his *Truelight* until he sold her in 1959, but by then, the magic of the time had passed. Only memories remained of the likes of the *Hunter* and her skipper Anthony Conneely (sometimes with Eóin Concannon on board), the *Lord* and Johnny Conneely, the *St. Mary* and *Colleen* and John Moore O'Flaherty, the *Ave Maria*, *Shamrock* and the *Peter* owned by Peter Greene, the *Morning Star* and Pat Flaherty, the *Volunteer* owned by the Ruanes, the *St. John* of the Currans and the *Capall*, *Mary Anne* and a host of other boats which have long since sailed into the sunset of time.

Revival of The Claddagh boats

During the Sixties and Seventies, only a few small púcáns and *gleóiteogs* hugged the weathered limestone quays of the Claddagh and Long Walk. Fear seemed to stalk the timber of their hearts as fading tar crinkled on their sides and rising slime signalled long periods of inactivity. There was the odd sailing for the box of mackerel and, once a year, the excitement of the Blessing of the Bay when conditions were right. Beyond that, no one noticed these old boats amid the noise of outboard engines and the special wonder of the new fibre hull.

Even as the Eighties dawned, Richard Scott in his work, The Galway Hookers, was compelled to write:

> *"Today the Claddagh gives no outward clue to the extent of its history, apart from three or four small gleóiteogs maintained for part-time use....."*.

However, things were happening elsewhere, especially among the sailing clubs on eastern coastlines. As the sport of sailing grew among the expanding middle classes, the design of sailing craft, both old and new, came under scrutiny. Enthusiasts delved into the sailing past and, appropriately, the Galway Hooker returned to fashion. As the few remaining boats saw new hands restore their timbers (and pride) again, an ancient way of life was saved from extinction. The old boats sailed out proudly once more and shaking off the passage of time, competed in the *Cruinniú na mBád* Festival at Kinvara, and others off the western coasts.

A Galway Hooker Association was formed and Richard Scott rightly praises it and its work:

> *"My acknowledgments also to the East Coast members of the Galway Hooker Association, whose practical application to the restoration of the Galway hooker is far greater than I could hope to emulate. These were the men who fired the revival furnace ...."*.

Richard Scott is being rather sparse with the truth, however, because he, too, contributed greatly to the revival of the boats and the fruits of his work are visible along the quays of the Claddagh today. Eight *gleóiteogs* glisten in the blackness of new paint just now while others are being carefully restored at the end of Long Walk. *The Fiona*, and *Siobhán Bheag* are new names to add to that special list of ancient fishing boats which plied their trade beyond the Quay Stream so many years ago as the McDonaghs, The Barretts, the Lynskeys, the Jennings, the Baileys, the Connollys, the Hernons, the Fahys, and others continue to sail down the Quay Stream. They add spice to the future of sail in this ancient harbour, a stony place when gentle breezes first blew a skin boat out on to the blue.

Their old lines mark them as being unique to these waters of the West, for each boat is, according to Cormac MacConnell:

> *".... a hard-working fisherman's wife, no time for cosmetics, with a body bred for work, big and wide about the bosom and the backside. Even historically she was the Dutch burgher's woman rather than the Spanish Lady."*

Setting out on Galway Bay (1993 Oireachtas Galway Hooker Race): Memories of the Claddagh fleet setting off for the fishing grounds beyond Mutton Island. (Courtesy Joe Shaughnessy, *Connacht Tribune*).

Four-picture study of Pat Jennings setting sail (15th August,1993): (a) Rounding Nimmo's Pier; (b) Sailing on the bay; (c) Nearing Mutton Island; (d) Sailing off Salthill .

At anchor 'in the roads' (1910's): Two square-rigged vessels and eight Claddagh Hookers await for high tide.

Setting back in calm conditions (1940): The oars are out as sails capture very little wind. (Courtesy Maura Fennell and John Monahan).

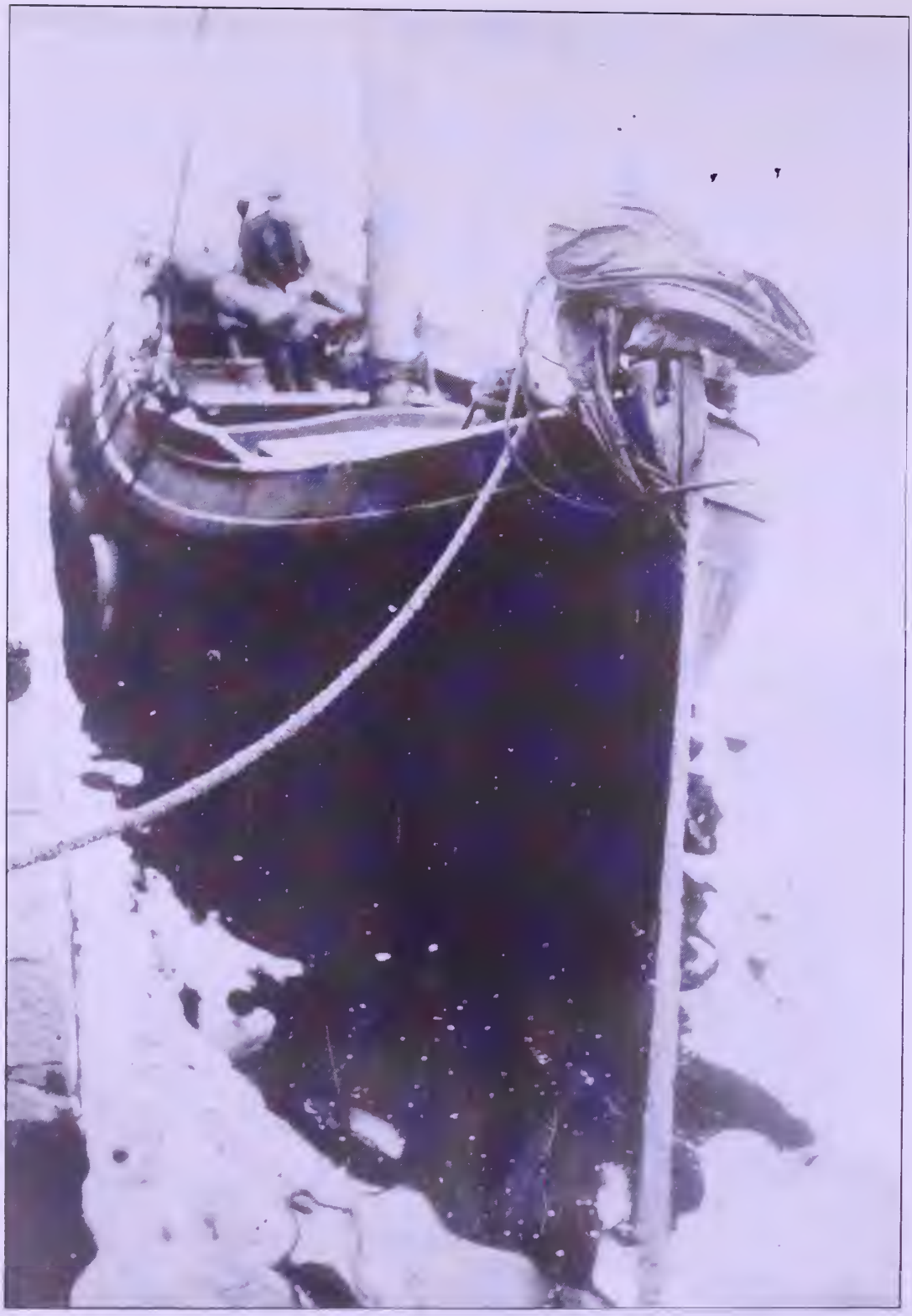
Time for a breather at Nimmo's Pier: Galway Hookers, their holds filled to the brim with *feamainn* (seaweed) rest alongside the top of Nimmo's tide as they await the turn of the tide. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Time for that chat at Nimmo's Pier! The Bádóirí relax among a world of rope, tarred wood and stout masts. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Rounding Nimmo's Pier: Full tide now, and with a fair wind following, Claddagh Hookers enter Galway harbour waters. (Courtesy Paul Duffy).

Tacking up to 'The Bankeen': The incoming Hooker is tacking well in the breeze as local people stroll along the pier. (Courtesy Michael Griffin).

Coming ashore at last: Another Claddagh Hooker berths after a long night of fishing for herring. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).



Last chores before going home. Mairtin Oliver stores his gear in his famous Galway Hooker, *Truelight,* after berthing. This is the boat in which he survived the dreadful Cleggan Disaster storm on the 28th October,1927. (Courtesy Maureen Cunningham).

Boats at rest. Three Claddagh Hookers lie tied up by the Claddagh Quay. One of the old rowing boats is shown beached beside the steps near the bottom end of Dogfish Lane. (Courtesy National Library).

Drying sails: In this Christmas Greetings card, two Claddagh Hookers dry their sails in the calm Winter sun in the Claddagh Basin, while nearer to the camera at Ballyknow Quay, a Púcán dries its sail also. (Courtesy Brendan Carroll, *Connacht Tribune*).

The end in sight! One of the wooden trawlers, which helped lead to the demise of the original Claddagh fleet, lies beside a deep-bellied *Gleóiteog* and the remains of an old rowing boat. (Courtesy Jimmy O'Connor).

Still work to be done. Three highly experienced Claddagh fishermen mend their nets on the quay. From left: Paddy Oliver, Paddy Naughton, and Martin Oliver, later King of the Claddagh. (Courtesy Tom Kenny, Martin, 'Maicín' Oliver and Pexia Heenan).

More Net Mending. Michael and Paddy Oliver tend to their nets with young Martin 'Maicín' Oliver. (Courtesy Mary Ellen Oliver).

Chapter 5

"Fresh Herrings" — The Story of the Claddagh Fish Market

The Fish Market

> *"The Aran fisherman, in his knee-breeches and pampootas, bargaining with the silver-haired Claddagh lady, whose shrimps were jumping out of her apron; where the cockles were smacking their lips with the heat, the johndories were alive, and the lobsters were playing pitch and toss with the crabs....."* .

Thus did Sir William Wilde, in his book, *Lough Corrib*, after making his way down through the heart of Galway *"among the turf-kishes, and potato baskets, and the carts of sea wrack – along through handsome groups of blue-eyed, black-haired, bare-footed colleens, with their graceful carriage, red petticoats, and blue and scarlet cloaks – down to the Fishmarket gate"* record forever the magic of the moment as buyer met seller in a Galway fish market already old in 1867.

From its earliest years, the marketing of fish, both sea and freshwater, played an important part in the life of medieval Galway so much so that two distinct markets were designated for the purpose. According to the 1651 Pictorial Map of Galway, the market for freshwater fish was *'before Blake's Lane, called The little gate corners'* off Upper Abbeygate Street today. Here, salmon, trout, eel, pike and other coarse fish from the Corrib system were sold at the market three days a week.

According to Professor M. D. O'Sullivan in her book, *Old Galway,* the plentiful produce of the sea, delivered daily to the quays, not merely supplied the town with all its requirements, but constituted one of its chief exports. The seafish market took place in *'the market, or fish shambles, before and in the Fisher's Lane'* according to the 1651 map. Thus, the selling of seafish initially took place in Back Street, or St. Augustine Street near where Mayoralty House is today.

Times changed, however, and as the Claddagh became the main fishing centre for the town in the 18th century, the buying and selling of the sea harvest tended to be carried out in the vicinity of the Great West Bridge, later O'Brien's Bridge, the only connecting link between the fishing village and the town at the time. As the 19th century dawned, the main fish market stretched in a loop up along Raven Terrace, Dominick Street, Bridge Street and across Cross Street down to Quay Street.

Fish hawkers also visited these locations to purchase herrings when in season and sell them not alone in nearby towns and villages but even in Eyre Square. William Makepeace

Thackeray took painful note of this latter activity in his *The Irish Sketch Book 1842* as he stared from the window of Kilroy's Hotel:

> *"A great wide, blank, bleak, water-whipped square lies before the bedroom window.... . Donkeys and pony-carts innumerable stand around, similarly reflected; and in the baskets upon these vehicles you see shoals of herrings lying. After a short space this prospect becomes somewhat tedious, and one looks to other sources of consolation".*

The hub of the fish market, however, was centred in the narrow confines of Bridge Street leading to the bridge. No facilities were provided by the Corporation for the selling of fish in the area, however, and not surprisingly, local shopkeepers and the public objected to the smell and nuisance generated by the market.

New Site

Something had to be done and as the 19th century dawned, General Meyrick, Governor of the town, prevailed on the principal citizens to provide a more suitable site. Thus the move to the Spanish Arch area came about, but not, it seems, without initial complaints from the fish sellers.

The fish sellers, in other words, the women of the Claddagh, objected to the long walk to the new site, and demanded a new bridge be built across the Corrib where Wolfe Tone bridge is today. They eventually got their wish, when a temporary wooden bridge was left in position after the completion of the Eglinton Canal development in 1851. This bridge was replaced in 1887 by an iron one, which was superseded in 1934 by the present rather plain concrete structure.

The way was open then for the women sellers to transport their husband's catch in baskets, skibs, and various other containers to the newly created flat ground area in front of the Spanish Arch when the former medieval dockland there was filled in. The site was open, airy and adjacent to the fish landing area of the Claddagh itself. In appropriate high tide conditions, the Claddagh Hookers could even land their catches directly on to its stone wharf, which alleviated much of the toil in transporting the fish across the bridge.

According to Domhnall Ó Caoimh, because of the bulk and size of the herring catches in the early part of the 19th century, the men sold the fish themselves beside the quay. Here, buyers often threw various coins into the hold of the boat, representing how much a pound they would pay for the catch. If the money was accepted by the skipper, the deal was made there and then.

In all other cases, however, the women did the selling after the boats berthed, either directly to the customer or sometimes through an intermediary as Hardiman explains:

> *"Their return (especially if heavily laden) is joyfully hailed by their wives and children, who meet them on the shore. They are immediately regaled at the next public house, the fish instantly becomes the property of the women (the men after landing never troubling themselves further about it,) and they dispose of it to a poorer class of fish-women, who retail it at market".*

Dutton comments somewhat similarly:

> *"The boat is then unladen, and the fish carried to market by the women, who exclusively take possession of it, the husband never interfering, and it is sold to hawkers and women who keep standings in the market".*

Commentators such as Francis B. Head noted other aspects of the market at the Spanish Arch more commonly known as *An Póirse Caoch* or The Blind Arch:

> *"After proceeding some way I was gradually assailed by a very strong smell, and, summoning my eyes to the elucidation of this discovery of my nose, I perceived hanging on some rails before me a quanity of salted, conger-eels, split open; in short, I found myself in a fish-market with mackerel, 'hake' and other beings fresh from the vasty deep, of such guttural names that, although they were over and over again pronounced to me, I felt the alphabet had not consonants enough to repeat them".*

Henry Coulter's book, *The West of Ireland* (1862) contained a drawing of a scene at the fish market showing two fish women, complete with baskets, against a background of bobbing boat masts. Perhaps, Tom Kenny, in his weekly column in the *Galway Advertiser,* best describes the scene as it was:

> *"It must have been a lovely scene, with the various types of skibs, creels and ciseáns full of fish, the women in their patterned shawls, their red petticoats and their blue cloaks all vying with one another for the attention of potential customers".*

This market scene was a familiar one to travellers who came in even greater numbers as the century progressed. To them, the fish market at the Spanish Arch was a place of wonder, where the selling of fish was still carried on in the ancient way by people clad in clothes only seen in history books and whose language could have come straight out of darkest Africa.

It was too good an opportunity to miss during the visit of the Earl of Eglinton who came to Galway in 1852 to officially open the canal which bears his name today. The *Illustrated London News* of the 28th August of that year reports:

> *"Their Excellencies, the Earl and Countess of Eglinton after receiving the address of the Harbour Board, and enjoying a short sail in Galway Bay, returned ashore at the Pier and were driven to a small steamer. A portion of the route from the landing pier to the basin wherein the tiny craft lay, chanced to be the fish market, and through this not very odoriferous locale their excellencies had to be driven, nay, even to a walk a portion; but then, had it not been so, one of the greatest treats in Galway, that of seeing the Claddagh men and women in their homes, would have been lost".*

Later still, when King Edward VII passed over the Claddagh Bridge on his tour of Galway in 1903, the market place held many Claddagh people eager only to bid him welcome. They lined the bridge and the long rectangular concreted area, known as 'The Concrete' in front of the Spanish Arch in order to get a better view of their 'other' king.

The Concrete

'The Concrete' was one of the few facilities, together with one or two gas lights, provided by the city authorities to help the women in selling the fish. Many photographs from the turn of the century show how popular this open piece of ground was for laying out the fish on a comparatively clean background, and, being adjacent to the river, could be quickly and easily supplied with fish from docking boats in proper tidal conditions. It soon became the main selling point in the Spanish Arch area, and enticed most of the buyers away from competing fish retail outlets, such as Conroy's and McDonogh's in Quay Street, and Deacy's in High Street. While Ruane's fish packing factory in the nearby Spanish Parade, with its rows of drying ling also attracted some attention, 'The Concrete' remained the chief focal point of the fish market in the Galway area for many years.

Here the women gathered especially on Thursdays in all sorts of weather conditions (often inclement) and displayed their fish as best they could. Large square baskets were used to store the main bulk of the fish, while the choicest examples were often displayed in oval creels or *ciseán,* which the women carried half hidden by their shawls.

The strangest basket of all, however, was the skib, a flat, rounded basket with raised edges which was balanced on the owner's head and used for carrying small quantities of herring and whiting. Eileen Cloherty of Fr. Burke Road describes how the use of a wet cloth with a double folding of the shawl above the head, formed a firm foundation for carrying the skib. This, of course, allowed freedom of movement of the hands as can be seen in the cover photograph of Maurice Semple's first book, *"Some Galway Memories"*. Here, a typical fish seller, poses for the camera with a fish in her right hand, as her left hand rests on her hip, while she expertly balances a fish-filled skib on her head. Beside her, other sellers get ready for the market, including some Connemara women with creels of vegetables and eggs to add variety to the fish market itself.

This unique market was not to last, however, and, as I mentioned in my book *"Vanishing Galway"*, the beginning of its end was at hand:

> *"Unfortunately, this unique spectacle, filled with its own special colours, smells and sounds, began to fade in the first quarter of this century as the Claddagh fleet declined, its younger generation lured to other lands and other seas. Those that remained, as Micko explains in Walter Macken's masterpiece on the Claddagh, 'Rain on the Wind', 'only longed for the fast covered-in motorboat to bring them home, filled with fish, in time for the pictures"*.

Thus, as the Claddagh fishing fleet declined, 'The Concrete' gradually grew silent as less boats berthed in Claddagh waters. It was difficult and eventually impossible to compete full time against the trawlers who provided the shop-based fish merchants with regular supplies of fish. In trying to compete, some Claddagh women erected a small stall beside 'The Concrete' from which they sold their fish. It was all to no avail, however, and the shops with their gleaming marble counters and varied fish displays, not to mention more competitive prices and indoor shopping comforts, prevailed in the end. Worse was to follow when 'The Concrete' was tarred over and the old fish baskets had to give way to 'Baby Fords' in Galway's newest carpark.

Mobile Sellers

This did not stop the Claddagh women from selling their fish elsewhere and for a time, marketing of fish at different locations throughout the city continued right up to the fifties.

Pat Horan, a former employee of McNamara's general shop at Moon's Corner, recalls how it was a policy of Mr. Maxwell, the manager, to leave boxes outside the premises as makeshift counters for Claddagh women, such as Mrs. "Mamo" Gill to sell fresh fish to McNamara's customers from the countryside. Other Claddagh women sold fish and 'dillisk' at Eyre Square and the railway station, at the 'Standings' in Shop Street and at the Claddagh Basin Bridge.

Perhaps, the strangest sellers of the lot, however, were the mobile fish women who toured the town and Salthill on foot, declaring to all and sundry in their loudest voices, "Fresh Fish", "Galway Bay Herrings – Fresh Herrings". In their own way, they provided Galway with a special service long before a trolly slid across the polish of a supermarket floor.

They, too, were to feel the winds of change, however, as H. V. Morton wistfully laments in 1930:

> *"There came towards us a girl who walked like a queen – in men's boots! She bore on her head a big round wicker-work basket in which the Galway women sell fish. She was a beauty of the dark kind. She was going home to put on stockings, high-heeled shoes, and a tight little black felt hat! It was, I felt, somehow unfortunate that after resisting the world for so long the Claddagh should have capitulated to Mr. Selfridge".*

Landing the fish (1830). The Claddagh before the Claddagh Basin was built. Fishermen and their wifes unload the catch at the Claddagh Quay in this marvellous study of wellies, baskets and masts. The Corrib is in full spate below the Great West Bridge and mills line its banks. To the right, Blakes Castle towers above the Spanish Arch. (Courtesy Paul Francis Duffy).

Discussing the prospects of a good sale at the fish market (1870's): In this drawing from the *Illustrated London News,* fishermen discuss fish prices with their wifes before the women set off across the wooden bridge to the fish market.

Bringing the fish to market: As this postcard (printed in Berlin) states, four Irish Fish Wifes make their way up along Long Walk to the fish market in front of the Spanish Arch or *An Póirse Caoch* (the Blind Arch) as it was known then. (Courtesy Jimmy O'Connor).

Using their heads: Women with fish skibs on their heads arrive at the fish market. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

The fishmarket in full swing. One can sense the lively debate as the selling commences and the crowds gather. The salmon fishery tower is shown on the right and the large building to the left was the old St. Nicholas National School in the*Garra Glas*. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Start of the market: General view from the fishery tower across the wooden Claddagh bridge to the open fishmarket area. (Courtesy National Library).

'The Concrete': As this more recent postcard shows, 'The Concrete', a concreted selling area had been constructed while loads of seaweed pile up to the right awaiting collection. (Courtesy Jimmy O'Connor).

The market is over: People start to disperse in the rain as the market comes to an end. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Selling up the town: Two Claddagh ladies sell shell-fish and fish outside the County Club at Eyre Square. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Young 'sellers' await the return of the fishermen in 1990! Claddagh school girls dress up for their 'Claddagh Long Ago' project. Standing: Carol Durnin, Emma Collins, Karina O'Connell, Lynda Shaughnessy, Barbara Campbell. Kneeling: Niamh Noonan, Helena O'Flaherty and Marie Griffin. (Courtesy Gretta Kenny, Claddagh National School).

Chapter 6

"St. Mary's on the Hill" — The Claddagh Dominicans

Early Beginnings

> *"A church is a special kind of building. It is not just so many tons of brick and mortar and stone put together in a more-or-less pleasing design. For the people who go there it is the spiritual nerve-centre of a whole area. It is the place where they first went to Mass, and where they were first introduced as children to the sacramental life of Penance and Holy Eucharist. To it each day they bring their faith in God, their charity for one another as a community, their working-hands, their prayers. The Dominican Church, Claddagh, has played no small part in the spiritual formation of generations of Claddagh people. It is a living expression of their faith in God. It is God's presence in their midst. How many Claddagh fishermen have slipped into the Church before setting out to sea, to invoke God's blessing on their labours? How many wives, mothers and children of Claddagh fishermen have prayed there for their men's safe return?".*

How many, indeed? We, too, might ask that same question first posed by Albert O'Beirne, O.P. in his article, 'St. Mary's On The Hill' published in Vol. 51 (Autumn, 1970) of *The Mantle* , The Galway diocesan magazine.

There can be little doubt, however, that countless Galwegians have visited this place of prayer down through the centuries. It all began in 1488, when the Athenry Dominicans, with the blessing of Pope Innocent Vlll, and, at the request of the citizens, took possession of St. Mary's on the Hill. This was an old chapel originally abandoned by the Premonstratensian Canons of Tuam on the slope leading to Fairhill.

As the new century dawned, we find the Dominicans busy consolidating and extending their foundation in the Claddagh. Although it started its Dominican days as a vicariate or daughter-house of Athenry, St. Mary's eventually gained the status of a Priory about 1612. Ten years later the largest Dominican community in Ireland was housed on that gentle slope overlooking the Quay Stream.

Such facts can be misleading, however, because as Hugh Fenning, O.P. says in his contribution, 'Galway Dominicans: A Chronology 1241 – 1991' in the publication,*"The Dominicans in Galway 1241 – 1991* edited by Eustás Ó Héideáin O.P.*:*

> *"Between 1590 and 1610, because of increasing persecution under Elizabeth and James I, Dominican activity in Galway was eclipsed, if it did not completely die".*

The Dominicans were a hardy lot, however, and with help from the Tribal families, they managed to survive the problems associated with the dissolution of the monasteries. According to Fr. Fenning:

> *"From the year (1617) the picture is one of gradual consolidation and recovery, despite occasional proclamations and even persecution".*

Such progress came to an end in 1642, when civil war blood stained the very steps of St. Mary's after its occupation by a Parliamentarian expeditionary force led by Lord Forbes, a Cromwellian zealot. As we have seen, he failed to subdue the nearby town of Galway, whose allegiance to the Crown grew stronger with each cannon blast. He left in anger but darker deeds followed.

Perhaps, the saddest one occured in 1651, when, as mentioned earlier, the town forces, with Dominican consent, demolished St. Mary's to prevent its use again by Parliamentarian forces. The main church building, consisting of twin naves, transepts and a lazarus house attached diagonally to the choir, is depicted in the 1651 Pictorial Map of Galway and a reconstruction of its ground plan and side elevation is provided by Michael Conneely in Eustás O Héideáin's work. The demolition of such a fine structure must have caused deep distress to the friars despite the promise of its reconstruction by Galway Corporation when the opportunity arose.

This sacrifice of stone and spirit was to no avail, because the town eventually surrendered to Sir Charles Coote in 1652. Its citizens were forced to flee and many of the clergy, including the Dominicans, sought refuge on the continent.

With the Restoration, however, calm spread across the shattered land. A new king, Charles II, sat on the throne, and as peace came to the Claddagh, the Dominicans were busy again re-establishing their presence beside the Quay Stream. Building a new church took pride of place as Roderic O'Flaherty noted:

> *"Fr. Daniel Nolan, Pryor of this convent, Anno 1670, deceased; Anno 1669, built there a large chapell, and covered it with brick".*

This particular building, seemingly sported a thatched roof, and impressed St. Oliver Plunkett who, according to Fr. Fenning, described it in 1647 as '*the best and most ornamented church in the Kingdom*'. They were happy moments then, and returning Tribal families were delighted to endow their favourite chapels once again as peace settled across the land.

It was a calm before a terrible storm, however, as English kings were soon to fight their not so private wars across the Irish landscape. Defeat at Aughrim in 1691 meant the Catholic cause was lost and the spectre of religious intolerance stalked both country boreen and Claddagh lane alike. The day eventually came in 1698, when the Dominican friars were forced to sail yet again into lonely exile on the continent.

Before their departure, however, the Prior, Fr. Gregory French, placed the community's valued possessions in the care of Valentine Browne, a trusted Galway merchant. A copy of the receipt given for these valuables is published in Eustás O Héideáin's already mentioned book. As well, according to Dominican tradition, the friars buried their largest possessions,

the venerable wooden statue of the Madonna of the Rosary and a bronze chapel bell in the Priory grounds as a pledge of their return.

As early 18th century mornings dawned across the Quay Stream, the Dominican presence was never far away, and by 1720 according to Fr. Fenning, the Dominican community in Galway totalled seven. A chronology of the Dominicans in Galway published in Eustás O Héideáin's work, showed quite clearly that official pressure on the Order gradually eased due to the rather surprising refusal of the Mayor and his Sheriffs to implement the anti-Catholic mandate of the English government.

The fading handwriting for November, 1730 in the Dominican House accounts partially explained this unique non-enforcement of the law. It simply states:

> *"For claret to treat the Sheriffs in their search the llth... 2s 2d".*

One need not be surprised then when Hardiman recorded a rather strange outcome to another 'raid' on St. Mary's by officials during 1731:

> *"On this occasion the mayor reported 'that they also searched the friary in the west suburbs, called the Dominican friary, wherein is a large chapel, with a gallery, some forms and an altar-piece, defaced; in which said reputed friary there are ten chambers and eight beds, wherein, they believe, the friars belonging to the said friary usually lay, but could find none of them....".*

Thus, religious intolerance was already on the wane in the middle of the 18th century in a town predominantly Catholic. The rantings of Stratford Eyre, the new Governor of Galway in 1747, against the Catholic ethos were seen as counter-productive to the town's welfare, and differences were mostly set aside by the end of the century. Thus, the strange sight of an Augustinian friar guarding the West Bridge as the local Protestant militia went north to fight the French in 1798 should not cause too much surprise, given the changing circumstances of the time.

The Dominicans were busy in their own way also and from the afore-mentioned chronology we learn that Fr. James French built a new priory in 1792 and was also instrumental in building a new church between 1800 and 1815. This is the church shown in early photographs of the Claddagh and its distinctive belfry probably echoed in 1809 to the first Catholic church bell rung in Ireland since the start of Penal times.

By then, the economic welfare of the Claddagh people was uppermost in the Dominican mind and the vain efforts of Fr. Hughes to entice the fishermen to adopt trawling as a more productive way of fishing has already been chronicled. The fine efforts of Fr. Hughes and Fr. Rushe in establishing the Piscatory School has been mentioned also and for the rest of the 19th century, the Dominicans were ceaseless in their efforts to help the fishermen and their families find a better life.

Neither was the spiritual life of the community neglected, and as the century drew to its close, the need to build a new church became essential. Bro. Alphonsus O'Donoghue collected over £1,500 in America for the building fund and when the present St. Mary's was opened on 25th October, 1891, the total cost of the church, including altars, furniture, sacristy and complete equipment was, according to Fr. O'Beirne, just over £7,000. Like

earlier Tribal families, many contributed to the cost such as John Connolly of Liverpool (formerly from Fairhill) who donated the marble pulpit and the stations of the cross. There was joy in the Claddagh heart then when the bishop of Galway, Most Rev. Dr. McCormack, blessed and opened a larger and more modern St. Mary's on the Hill.

This fine church, although clothed in the glow of warm Galway granite, seemed so new, so different from its predecessor. It needed something special to wed it to the past. Thus, on Sunday, 22 May, 1922, there was happiness in the Claddagh yet again as both clergy and people walked in proud procession through a bedecked village to install the old statue of the Madonna of the Rosary to a place of honour in the specially prepared side chapel beside the high altar. The new church had found its ancient heart.

Our Lady of Galway

> *"The Galway Dominican Fathers are justly proud of having the city's most popular shrine. In their church on the Claddagh, St. Mary's on the Hill, devotion to the Rosary goes back three hundred years and centres round a carved wooden statue of Our Lady which is nearly as old".*

Thus, does Catriona Macleod commence her article, 'Our Lady of Galway' in the 1944 issue of *The Capuchin Annual* . We learn how the 17th century Baroque art style of Italy and devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Rosary are reflected in the carved statue, 'The Madonna of the Rosary', which we know today as 'Our Lady of Galway'.

According to the writer, this beautiful carving of the Madonna was probably brought to St. Mary's by Spanish-trained Dominican priests returning from exile. It seems that they also brought the first rosaries to the country because it was their belief that *"The Blessed Virgin would not fail the penalised Irish in their hour of need".*

As we have seen, tradition tells how the statue was buried in 1698 and, according to Fr. O'Beirne, it was about the time the 1815 church opened. . . .

> *"that the statue of Our Lady was discovered. An old brother, Brother Alphonsus O'Donoghue, born in 1838, mentions in his notebook that the statue stood during his lifetime on a pedestal inside the Priory door, where it remained battered, dingy and unheeded for almost another century".*

It was only when Fr. William Stephens, the new Prior, recognised the historical importance of the statue in 1921, that plans were laid to install it in the Church of St. Mary on the Hill the following year. Sent for cleaning to Dublin, it was then that the true beauty of the wooden madonna unfolded as the grime of centuries, not to mention a 'dingy coat of Reformation whitewash and white enamel' were removed.

According to Catriona MacLeod:

> *"Her* (the statue's) *mild expression and classic features resemble a Maratti painting. Her animated form, her breeze-blown draperies, the curling clouds and angels' heads that cling about her feet suggest that she has alighted from another sphere, forbidden to the senses and upon whose threshold imagination halts..... . The Holy Child sits upright on her arm looking out over the world, His right hand raised in blessing the Rosary which she offers with spontaneous gesture.....".*

To go with such beauty and piety, John Kirwan, the 1683 Catholic mayor of Galway and the first after the Cromwellian era, presented a silver crown for the statue to the grateful friars. Today, a copy of this wonderful offering adorns the head of the madonna while she holds a mother-of-pearl Rosary in her right hand, a gift from a Claddagh seaman by the name of Clancy.

According to Fr. O'Beirne, much thought was then given to providing a suitable background for the statue after its installation in the church. A fund was started and a theme in mosaic echoing the old traditions of the Claddagh was chosen. In his article on St. Mary's, Fr. O'Beirne, includes the following description provided by Fr. Henry Gaffney, O.P:

> *"The key-piece of the design is a figure of St. Nicholas, the patron of Galway City. On the left is St. Enda, patron of Aran, with his episcopal hand raised in benediction over the path through the waters of a Claddagh boat with its patched brown sails set, and symbolic fish rising in its wake. On the right is St. Attracta watching lovingly over the labours of the fishermen. In the background there rises from the waters a hill on which is perched a church, to represent the Claddagh Church itself, of which the ancient title is that of St. Mary of the Hill. On either side of the Altar is the figure, worked in mosaic, of a Claddagh youth and maiden with the old brown beads passing through their fingers".*

This, then is the 'Our Lady of Galway' shrine in St. Mary's, where Italian, Spanish and native Irish traditions mingle, where the mosaic brown sails of a Claddagh boat can feel at home with the wafting head-veil of a carved Italian Baroque madonna. Yet there is more to treasure here as Catriona MacLeod points out:

> *"They* (the Claddagh people) *value it, not as a work of art, but because of the belief it represents, because its history has been so closely linked with their own penal sufferings that they have come to look upon this statue as the symbol of Our Lady's special protection over Galway".*

The Dominican Involvement

As well as looking after their own spiritual affairs and those of their flock, especially from 1971 onwards when the Claddagh became part of the new parish under their care, the Dominicans also involved themselves in the temporal welfare of their people. During the 19th century, they continually tried to help the Claddagh fishermen secure a better livlihood from the sea. They did their best to help the more progressive fishermen secure loans and often were on hand when the less fortunate tried to redeem their nets at the start of each new fishing season.

The Dominican Fathers also endeavoured to promote the virtues of trawling as a means of improving income from fishing, but without success. Failing this, they founded the Piscatorial School in the Claddagh in 1846, and tried to incorporate the latest fishing skills and techniques in the school curriculum. The normal range of national school subjects eventually prevailed, however, and this praiseworthy venture foundered in the course of time.

When the Great Famine brought the dreaded cholera in its aftermath, the Domincan friars were there to help as best they could. As the tides of time slid gently by, declining fish stocks saw the hopes and expectations of the Claddagh fishermen disappear. At such distressful moments, the friars were there to council and advise. When changing times saw payments made directly to the fishermen in the fateful surroundings of a public bar, thrift sometimes gave way to the evils of drink. The Dominicans saw a partial remedy in the provision of a community hall where financial and educational matters as well as tackle repair and recreation facilities could take place under one roof. Thus, the Claddagh Hall came into being in 1912 with more than a little help from the nearby friars. Today, the advantages of thrift is again exemplified in the Dominican Penny Bank which commenced in 1987 and provides that little 'nest egg' for participants at Christmas as well as welcome aid to the church maintenance funds.

Of all the services provided by the Dominican Fathers to their special flock, the best known and most publicised is the annual Blessing of the Bay by the local Prior. On a Sunday in mid-August, a flotilla of boats from the Claddagh gathers around the craft containing the priest and altar boys as the unique ceremony seeking God's aid and protection for the fishermen is carried out on the seaward side of Mutton Island. His blessing to ensure a good fish (especially herring) harvest is mostly symbolic now, for herring fishing has long since ceased to interest the Claddagh. Yet, there are still the odd box of mackerel to be caught and loads of shrimp pots to service by those who still venture forth on the ancient fields.

Famous Religious People Connected with The Claddagh

FR. TOM BURKE, O.P.

In the 19th century, Father Tom Burke, O.P., (1830-83), a Galway man, born in Kirwan's Lane, was influenced so much by Brother Paul O'Connor, his teacher in the Patrician Brothers School, and, as he grew older, by Rev. Dr. Thomas Rushe, O.P., founder of the Piscatorial School in the Claddagh, that from a very early age, his young mind had turned towards the priesthood. At seventeen years of age he entered the Dominican Order and having spent time in Italy, England, and as superintendent in the Tallaght novitiate in Dublin, he became Prior of San Clemente, the Irish Dominican House in Rome in 1864 for three years.

By this time, Fr. Tom, as he was affectionately known, had already gained a reputation as a preacher and lecturer, with humour and wit being the keynote of his sermons. On 14 May, 1869, he delivered perhaps his greatest oration to an estimated fifty thousand people in Glasnevin Cemetery at the re-interment of the remains of Daniel O'Connell, a man whom he often saw at early Mass in Galway and who left a deep impression on him as a youth.

Yet it was his American lecture tour in 1872, according to Luke J. Taheny, O.P. writing in the *Patrician Brothers' Centenary Book,* that:

> *"began that great apostolate of preaching that won Father Tom the title of Prince of Preachers . No Irish priest with the possible exception of Father Matthew came face*

> *to face with such teeming multitudes, hungry for spiritual food, and eager for a man that would champion their cause".*

For about a year and a half he preached continually all across the United States and in the process collected over $50,000 for church funds as well as silencing anti-Irish commentators, such as James Antony Froude, the historian who sought to justify English occupation of Ireland. Heavy workloads such as these preaching tours took their toll however, and Fr. Tom died in Tallaght in 1883 a comparatively young man at the age of fifty-three. He was not forgotten in the Claddagh, however, and the limestone statue of this famous preacher by Cork sculptor, Seán Kavanagh, was unveiled in 1948 on the edge of the old *Garra Glas* area.

FR. PETER YORKE

Another famous preacher who, as a youngster, probably saw many a Claddagh fishing boat land its catch outside his family door on Long Walk was Fr. Peter Yorke (1864-1925). He, too, achieved fame in America where he stood up for the oppressed especially the Irish in San Francisco where he was based, while serving under a very unsympathetic archbishop. This did not inhibit him from acting as a fearless spokesman for the labour movement there and he even published a newspaper expressing labour and Irish views. Like Fr. Tom Burke, he also sought to discredit those who regarded Catholics as enemies of America. Like Fr. Tom he was an outstanding religious educator and won the gratitude of Pope Pius X for his work in this field.

FR. DAMIAN LOUIS BYRNE, O.P.

This century also produced a Galway man, who, from his home in Beattystown in the New Claddagh, has made his name on the international stage and became the friend of popes. Fr. Damian Byrne, who entered the Dominican Order in 1949, and was ordained priest in 1955, returned to his native Claddagh as Prior of St. Mary's in 1963. Shortly afterwards, he set off for the missions in South and Central America before returning to Ireland as Provincial of the Dominican Order here. The greatest honour of all was then bestowed on Fr. Damian when he was elected Master of the entire Dominican Order in September, 1983. An ordinary lad from Beattystown had become the 83rd successor of St. Dominick himself!

Lay Involvement with the Claddagh Church

One of the first references to lay involvement in the spiritual affairs of the Claddagh Church is provided by Fr. Fenning when he refers to Galway having the largest Dominican community in 1622:

> *"These Galway Dominicans probably had a Rosary confraternity, as was usual elsewhere at this date. One of them, Nicholas Lynch, who was to become provincial (1628-31) is said to have 'restored devotion to the Rosary in Galway".*

Except for interruptions during the harsher periods of Penal times, there was always community involvement by the Claddagh people in church affairs through Confraternities, Sodalities, and even pilgrimages to holy wells. One such pilgrimage is mentioned by

Richard Hayward in his book, *The Corrib Country* (1943). When describing the Abbey at Knockmoy he declares:

> *"The Abbey was a Cistercian foundation, a daughter-house of the Abbey of Boyle, and it was richly endowed by Cathal* (of the Wine-Red Hand) *with large grants of land, which even included the town of Galway until the Wardenship of that place was established in 1484. A relic of this old association with the City of the Tribes existed until a few years ago, when on the 20th of August each year, which is St. Bernard's Day – the fishermen of the Claddagh went to Knockroe (Cnoc-Ruadh, the Red Hill) overlooking Knockmoy, and performed stations round the holy well in the summit."*

References to this ancient pilgrimage by the Claddagh fishermen are also contained in newspaper reports published by the *Tuam Herald* about a visit by the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland to the Tuam area in 1904. As well, memories of visits to Lady's Well in Athenry each August 15th are still remembered by the older Claddagh generation. Sodalities were also popular in the fishing village.

Pictured at the end of this chapter is a procession of the first Holy Name Sodality as they marched along by the Claddagh Basin. The Sodality was founded by Fr. O'Sullivan in the forties and was subsequently taken over by Fr. Columba Leahy. According to Tom Kenny, who published the photograph in his 'Old Galway' column in the *Galway Advertiser* on 25 October, 1984, members of the Sodality met every Wednesday night, and on the second Sunday of the month.

The annual procession of the Blessed Sacrament was also an opportunity for the Claddagh people to display their love for their church. A typical example of such devotion was captured in a large pictorial report entitled, 'The Faith of the Claddagh' in the *Connacht Tribune* of 30 June, 1928. Four photographs were published, which, unfortunately, are not clear enough to reproduce here, but the information with them is of interest:

> *"The Dominican Fathers have been associated with the Claddagh, Galway, for generations and our pictures typify the simple glories of the annual procession of the Blessed Sacrament held throughout the famous fishing village on Sunday week. (1) The white-robed children standing with silver baskets of flowers before the altar on the grounds from which the first Benediction was given, ready to strew the flowers on the way. (2) A sylvan-shaded altar of St. Dominick erected close to the church on the village street along which the procession passed. (3) The start of the procession. Very Rev. A. J. O'Reilly, O.P., Prior, is carrying the Blessed Eucharist and is assisted by Fr. Tighe, O.P. and Fr. Stephens, O.P. Dundalk. The canopy bearers being Messrs. M. Moone, J. MacNamara, B. Kelly and L. O'Donnell. (4) Mr. Oliver's house wreathed in evergreens and decorated with beautiful pictures is typical of how all the houses in the Claddagh were adorned for the solemn procession".*

Outward expressions of their faith by individual Claddagh people have also been varied and many. Perhaps the strangest are the series of minature Sacred Hearts carved by the late Paddy O'Toole on the flat stones which line the top of the wall on the seaward side of

Nimmo's Pier. One particular fine one, with spears piercing the heart, contained a perfectly shaped glass centre, now, alas, missing.

The true feeling of the people in Old Claddagh for their Faith, however, was best revealed in their rather strange speech patterns, when the word 'God' figured highly in each conversation. Fr. Ward notes this in his work:

> *"They* (the Claddagh people) *have their own way and their own words, and a greeting is a prayer. The usual salute, when friend or neighbor comes or goes, seems to be, 'God speed you,' and it is with this holy word that they address even the stranger. The word is varied, but it is always a prayer: 'God give you luck, God give you long life. God spare you the health. God prosper you, then.' Young boys salute the priest by using the nifty little gesture that is common now all over Ireland, and say quickly, 'God bless you, Father".*

Perhaps, as ever, we should leave the last words on the Claddagh people's involvement with their Faith and the Dominicans to James Hardiman:

> *"They are all Roman Catholics, with the exception of one or two Protestant families who settled amongst them during the last century. St. Nicholas their patron saint, they hold in the utmost veneration, as the protector of their profession, and celebrate his festival with the strictest observance. The contiguity of their village to the adjoining Dominian convent is one, and not the least, of the causes which attach them to their local situation. To this foundation they have been, from the earliest period, very liberal benefactors".*

Installing the statue, 'Our Lady of Galway' (1922): The Claddagh school girls in First Communion and Confirmation outfits walk in the procession leading to the installation of the ancient statue of "Our Lady of Galway' in the Dominican Church. Free State troops line the side of the Claddagh Basin and villagers stand nearer to the camera including Delia Long, Julia Raftery and Mary Browne. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne).

First Holy Name Sodality Procession (1940's): The men of the Claddagh, with Fr. Leahy, O.P. attending, march in procession by the Claddagh Basin. They include Eddie Cloherty, Tommy Ray, Michael Kelly, Willie Kelly, Tommy Nestor, Brod Long, Josie Cooke, - Fahy, Tommy Gill, Michael Keady, Martin Connor, M. Tierney, - Ruane, Peter Cubbard, Martin Anderson, R. Kelly, Mick Murphy, - Lally, Michael J. Noone, - Connell, Paddy Griffin, Michael Griffin, P. Joyce, Paddy O'Donnell, Addlie Hynes, Mike O'Donnell, John Healy, Tom Griffin, Paddy Burke, Richie Cantwell, Tommy Griffin and Mark Fitzgerald. (Courtesy Eileen Cloherty).

The Church of St. Mary on the Hill: This early photograph shows the newly erected granite-facaded Dominican Church. To the right is the Piscatorial School, which opened in 1846 and displays a statue of a sailor on its front roof. (Courtesy National Library).

Two Galway Madonnas: The much venerated baroque statue of 'Our Lady of Galway' (left) now to be admired in a side altar in the Church of St. Mary on the Hill and a close-up of the delightful wooden statue of the 'Madonna of the Quays', the work of sculptress, Clare Sheridan, which is exhibited in the city museum at the Spanish Arch. (Courtesy Brendan Lawlor and *The Connacht Tribune*).

Three famous Galway priests associated with the Claddagh: (a) Fr. Tom Burke O.P. (Courtesy *Connacht Tribune*) ; (b) Fr. Peter Yorke (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne); (c) Fr. Damian Byrne O.P. with Pope John Paul ll (Courtesy Michael Byrne).

Chapter 7

"In Life and in Death" — The Claddagh Way of Life

Life in General

> *"What the bank is to the landsfolk the sea was to the fisherman. He had only to cast his nets an' draw more fish than he wanted, for then the bay swarmed with every fish".*

So said Mrs. Padge King to writer, Mary Banim, in 1892 as she recalled the former prosperous times in the lives of the Claddagh villagers, which, by then, were passing into memory. The old way of Claddagh life was gradually breaking up, as outside trawlers took more than their fair share of fish, and the young men looked to the British navy for employment.

Although times were changing fast, most Claddagh people tried to cling to their old land-based traditional customs, as they saw the old ways associated with the sea gradually vanish. The Irish language, as mentioned earlier, was coming under pressure also, but it was some years before the demolition of the village began and the old way of life finally disappeared.

Dress

The traditional style of dress, so carefully described by 19th century writers, however, was already falling victim to changing fashions. The unique set of clothing, worn by both women and men, as described by Hardiman in 1820, was, by all accounts, quite colourful. The financial returns from fishing were good just then, and the men competed with the women in the colour and cut of their attire. On Sundays, according to Hardiman, no fisherman would venture forth to church without:

> *"Three flannel vests, under a fourth of white cotton or dimity* (a light strong cotton fabric with woven stripes and squares), *trimmed with tape of the same colour, over these a fine blue rug jacket with a standing collar and horn buttons, a blue plush breeches never tied or buttoned at the knees, blue worsted stockings, a pair of new brogues, a broad trimmed hat neither cocked nor slouched, and a red silk handkerchief about his neck ..... at all other times they wear the common jacket and trowsers usual with persons of their occupation".*

As 1892 dawned, however, there was little difference for many fishermen between their 'Sunday Best' and their ordinary clothes. The Winter fishing of 1891 had been particularly

bad as had previous Winters and very little money could be spared in many households for extra clothing especially for the men.

The dress of the women had hardly changed in seventy years, however, according to Mary Banim:

> *"The women still dress as they did long ago, in white cap, without a riband – the sign before now of one who spoke only Irish – a blue nap cloak, of the form peculiar to the women of the Claddagh and of Connemara, a red kerchief on the head, a plain gown tucked up over a crimson petticoat, and – save on Sundays and holidays – the bare feet".*

Compare this ensemble with Hardiman's description over seventy years earlier:

> *"The women still retain their ancient Irish habit, consisting of a blue mantle, a red body-gown, a petticoat of the same colour, and a blue or red cotton handkerchief bound round the head after the old fashion. On Sundays and festivals, however, they make a more modern appearance: a matron's dress being generally composed of a blue rug cloak trimmed with fine ribbon, a rich calico or stuff gown, with the red flannel body-gown, however, occasionally worn over it, and a silk handkerchief on the head. The dress of the young women differs but little from that of their mothers, except with the addition of a fine muslin or cambric (fine white linen fabric) cap, trimmed with the richest lace".*

S. Reynolds Hole also commented on the dress of the Claddagh women when he visited the village in 1859:

> *"..... but the women, in their bright red petticoats, descending half-way down the uncovered leg, their cloaks worn like the Spanish mantilla, and of divers colours, their headkerchiefs and hoods, were grouped among the old grey ruins where the fish market is held, and formed a tableau not to be forgotten. Though their garments are torn and patched and discoloured, there is a graceful simple dignity about them which might teach a lesson to Parisian milliners".*

Other commentators of the 19th century were also rather lavish in their praise of the colourful Claddagh dress, but in reality, the Paisley shawl, with its multitude of patterns, was already replacing the blue mantle or cloak as the century drew to its close. During recent festivals in Galway, Eileen Cloherty of Fr. Burke Road has modelled a very old dark red Paisley shawl, owned by the great grandmother of Martin Moran. The more familiar 'House Keeper's' shawl, fawn in colour with border patterns and tasseled, next made its appearance in the Claddagh. This particular shawl has lasted right down to recent times, and the one on display in the city museum at the Spanish Arch, has often been modelled by Claddagh's famous Molly Browne at various festivals and parades. There was a 'Sunday Shawl' type also and Mary Julia Browne of Fairhill has an example of this upper market version, which was worn only on special days. The black shawl, worn by those in mourning, was the last to appear and was the only one manufactured locally in Raftery's Woollen Mills in the *Garra Glas*. All four types are just memories now in the ever-changing world of women's fashion.

Gone also, are the *práiscín* or tough canvas apron, which was a common feature in early photographs of the Claddagh women, proof, indeed, that life was not as easy or as romantic for them as most writers claimed. The large pocket in this rough apron was home to prawn and shilling alike, as the wearer stood in rain and sun on that wind-swept concrete patch so many years ago.

Perhaps, the most startling fact about the Claddagh women of the 19th century, however, was that most went barefoot, except, as pointed out by Mary Banim, on Sundays and other special days. To her 19th century mind, and in the circumstances of the old village, wearing shoes rather than going barefoot had its disadvantages:

> *"The latter are better, that is, healthier for women who go much into the wet, because shoes and stockings would soak and hold the water, thus constantly exposing the wearer to far worse colds than any she may get from going barefoot".*

The fishermen also, mindful of the dreadful effects of harsh Atlantic rain and wind on their health, needed water-proof clothing on their fishing trips. While some drawings depict them wearing suitable sou'westers and stout jumpers, they often waterproofed their clothes with a compost of boiled potatoes and fish oil. As fashions and the quality of clothing improved in the new century, it was only a matter of time before the Claddagh followed suit.

H. V. Morton also noted the changing scene in 1930:

> *"I saw a sight typical of the modern Claddagh. From a primitive thatched house came a smart young girl in a fashionable felt hat, blue tailor-made costume, and flesh-coloured silk stockings. Her mother accompanied her to the door. The older woman belonged to a different generation – almost, so it seemed, to a different world. She wore the wide red skirt of a fisherwoman; her feet were bare, and with one hand she held a grey shawl over her shoulders".*

Times were obviously changing and not just in the fashion sense. Morton's guide, whom we simply know as Michael John, was eager to point out the beauty of the Claddagh lass and the fact that it was the norm for her to go up the town to meet the 'fellas':

> *"That's it, you see. The girls change from their working clothes and put on their finery to go out at night. Some of the smartest girls you'll see in Galway go home to a Claddagh cabin. In the old days the Claddagh never married outside itself. But now that's over. A Claddagh girl will marry a Galway boy".*

Marriage Customs

The demolition of the old Claddagh village speeded up the process of the Claddagh marrying outside itself, and many of the younger villagers found new homes and marriage partners in places as far away as Bohermore on the other side of the city. Previous to this, however, many of the Claddagh men fell in love with, and married, girls from Connemara and Aran whom they met on fishing or kelp gathering expeditions along the western seaboard.

It had been different in Hardiman's time, a hundred years before:

> *"It has been remarked that among this numerous colony matrimonial connexions are seldom formed beyond their native village. They generally intermarry with each other at an early age; and St. Patrick's day, the May and September fairs, but particularly midsummer eve, are the usual seasons for forming these alliances. During these periodical festivities the young man generally singles out the object of his choice".*

At these festive times, bonfires were often lit and an older custom was for a young Claddagh man to throw a lighted stick from the fire in the direction of the girl he fancied. If she liked him, she would throw it back! Marriage usually took place soon afterwards because it was the custom to wed at quite a young age and in a rather startling way, reflecting 'marriage by capture'.

Hardiman takes up the story again for us:

> *"A marriage is commonly preceded by an elopement; but no disappointment or dishonorable advantage, arising from that circumstance, has ever been known among them. A reconciliation between the young couple and their respective friends generally takes place the morning after the elopement; the clergyman's part of the ceremony is then performed, and the nuptials are solemnized with a boisterous kind of merriment usual only on these occasions. A cabin is soon provided for the new-married pair, who now, in their turn, commence housekeepers. The parents, if in good circumstances, contrive to supply the price of a boat (or at least a share in one) for the husband, and this, with a few articles of furniture, commonly constitute the entire of their worldly possessions".*

Two points are worth noting here. The part the famous Claddagh Ring played in the marriage process will be discussed in the next chapter. As well, marriage was for life and legal separations, divorce, adultery or any of the other problems of modern times were unknown in the Claddagh of long ago. Hardiman himself took note of this:

> *"Although the women are handsome, infidelity is a crime never heard of, and jealousy is equally unknown. Indeed in every instance the relative duties are here piously fulfilled; and, in particular, the care and respect with which they treat their aged parents are deserving of the highest praise".*

Perhaps, Francis B. Head did not quite believe how faithful the Claddagh people were to each other when he visited the village in 1852. After questioning a number of the local constabulary (the entire question and answer sessions are recorded in his book, *A Fortnight in Ireland*) he failed to discover a single case of illegitimacy being recorded there. Rather humbled, he asked:

> *"What ornament can these poor young people put on equal to that virtuous character which they wear wherever they go, and which, in spite of their poverty, it appears no human power can deprive them of!"*

He was further surprised to learn that the crime of theft had been utterly unknown among the fishermen. His surprise would have been lessened, of course, if he had noticed the lack of locks or bolts in the little thatched homes. Faithfulness, honesty and charity were hallmarks of the Claddagh character in the 19th century.

Childbirth in The Claddagh

The birth of a child in the old Claddagh, as elsewhere, was usually a joyous occasion. The event took place at home where neighbouring women assisted (doctor and nurse assistance only came later when medical services improved) and celebrations were known to wander down to the nearest public house! Still-births brought sadness, however, and dead unbaptised infants, it seems, as was the custom elsewhere, were usually buried in the old sanctified grounds.

As mentioned earlier, increased catches and revenue from fishing led to better living conditions in the 18th century. The arrival of the potato as a food source also helped, and despite mini famines and diseases, as listed by Professor James P. Murray in his chapter on health and medicine in *Galway Town & Gown 1484 – 1984* , the population rose from 528 in 1695 to 2,336 by 1812. Hardiman was quite specific in his comments about this:

> *"The women are generally prolific and the fine healthy children always to be seen in great numbers at the Claddagh are seldom excelled even in more opulent communities".*

Claddagh Cures

Conditions worsened during times of famine and fever epidemics and the younger children of the Claddagh, as mentioned previously, suffered most during the cholera outbreak of 1849. The tuberculosis epidemic started around 1830, according to Professor James Murray, and consumption took its toll in the Claddagh as well as in the tenements of Galway.

Before the visit of a doctor or nurse became routine or when the sick could be referred to the County Infirmary (now the County Buildings on Prospect Hill), the people of the Claddagh had to rely on old folk medicine cures handed down to them by generations of ancestors.

Eileen Cloherty of Fr. Burke Road and Mary Julia Browne of Fairhill Road recall for instance the curative power of cobwebs when placed on open cuts or wounds. A boiled portion of carbolic soap, sprinkled freely with brown sugar and applied on brown paper as a poultice to lumps or boils on the skin, cleared them up without a trace, but not, it seems, without a certain amount of discomfort during the application! Coughs and ancilliary problems gave way to hot milk spiced with *poitín* or honey, but the 'Cleheen' or a collapsed chest, the residue of rheumatic fever or consumption, was only remedied by 'cupping'. This rather strange cure was enduced by placing a lighted candle inside an upturned glass or tumbler on the patient's bare chest!

Not everyone had the power to help the afflicted, however, and the person 'who had the cure' was a valued member of the community. He or she healed the sick in a way never mentioned now in modern medical works.

Death was never far away in the 19th century, however, and when it came to the Claddagh, a whole set of rules and rituals were set in motion as old as time itself.

The Claddagh Wake

After death, the corpse was washed and prepared for the wake. Chairs were borrowed from the neighbours and provisions such as drink, food, and *dúidín* pipes (in later times from "Havertys" in Raven Terrace) were collected. By the time the people came to pay their last respects, the keening (crying) women were already at work rendering the air with mournful wails and the longest, drawn-out groans their old lungs could sustain. The widow, if the husband had died, joined in also among the prayers and wails, and her pleas of what she and her children were to do were common features of the keening process.

Keening was perhaps the oldest native tradition to survive into modern times and although it was banned from the streets and homes by Galway Corporation by-laws of 1604 and 1625, it naturally survived in the world of the Claddagh. Unfortunately, its native nuances never bridged the culture gap when performed in English by the last dwellers of the Old Claddagh before the village was demolished in the Thirties. Molly Browne, Claddagh's well-known entertainer, heard the following English version as a young girl in the village, and despite the lack of flavour of the Irish, her audio-taped voice trembles with the sense of passion and emotion of the keening process:

"Goodbye now Johnnnnnny my love, goodbye,
What will I do now tonight now Johnny and all the rest of the little ones,
Twelve in aaaaallllll,
It will be easy to count them all sooooooooooon,
Oh it's true what will I do,
So goodbye Johnny you were always good to me in your life,
I will pray for you, Johnny,
Mary."

From this, one might assume that the Claddagh wakes of long ago were entirely sad and lonely affairs, but nothing could be further from the truth. The wake was in fact a joyous occasion, when the neighbours gathered not only to offer condolences and pray for the bereaved, but to partake in festivities associated in the dead person's journey to a better world. Except at church gatherings, the people of the Claddagh had little opportunity to meet on social occasions, and the wake filled that niche in a very special way.

Drink, food, snuff, *dúidín* pipes and tobacco were provided in generous quantities by the mourning household and were utilised to the full by the continuous stream of callers. Many, of course, tended to stay for the duration of the wake and after long tributes to the departed, and even longer visits to the porter barrel, one often found the wake taking on a more festive atmosphere than perhaps it should. Games such as 'Spin the Bottle', which, perhaps need no explanation, were played as well as ones demanding memory skills. Michael Griffin, recalls one entitled 'The House that Jack Built':

"Tis not like wakes of today. We would always be brought in for the tea and currant-cakes, or whatever would be going. And there would be jokes and pranks going. Usually, somebody like Paddy Burke, the Lord have mercy on him, would start us off. He would line up six to ten chairs along by the wall for whoever would want to play. He would go along with a strap then and he'd start the following refrain, 'This is the

house that Jack built'. He'd go around and get everyone to say it. Then he'd add on another bit, and another bit, and so on. Everytime he added on a bit you had to say the whole lot. If you failed, he gave you a slap and after so many slaps you were out. Here is the refrain from the start as Paddy would give it to you;

This is the house that Jack built.
This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the sack that held the malt that lay .....
This is the cord that tied the sack that held .....
This is the rat that cut the cord that tied .....
This is the cat that killed the rat that cut .....
This is the dog that worried the cat that killed .....
This is the cow with the crumelty horn that tossed the dog all over the barn that worried .....
This is the lady all forlorn that milked the cow with the crumelty horn that tossed .....
This is the man all tattered and torn that kissed the maid all forlorn that milked .....
This is the priest all shaven and shorn that married the man all tattered and torn that kissed .....
This is the cock that crowed in the morning that woke the priest all shaven and shorn that married .....
This is the farmer that sowed his corn that kept the cock that crowed in the morning that woke .....".

When eventually there was a winner, the whole game started again but this time everything was reversed. According to Michael, you took one deep breath and off you went thus:

"This is the farmer sowing his corn
That kept the cock that crew in the morning
That woken the priest all shaven and shorn
That married the man all tattered and torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumelty horn
That tossed the dog all over the barn
That worried the cat
That killed the rat
That cut the cord
That tied the sack
That held the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built."

Such games, of course, eased the tension and the sense of loss in the household where the death occured and shortened the time until the more serious side of the burial took place, usually in Rahoon Cemetery. Some burials also took place in Forthill and in the New Cemetery in Bohermore. Thus, in death, as well as with the demolition of the old thatched village, a scattering of the once close-knit community occured. The identity of the Claddagh blurs a little more with each passing year as a unique way of life and death fades into memory.

Claddagh Superstitions

There were pishrogues (superstitions) also attached to the wake itself. Only the person who washed the corpse could throw out the water, which had to be kept in a basin beneath the bed, until after the burial. Even the chairs and seats borrowed from the neighbours were held until after the burial and even then, they had to be washed solely by the people who suffered the bereavement.

The main area of superstition among the people of the Claddagh, however, centred on their fishing. While the fishermen were scrupulous in their preparations before going to sea and could 'read' the weather better than most, certain omens or signs, both good and bad, determined whether they sailed or not.

The sight of a red-haired woman for instance was enough to keep the Claddagh fishing fleet from sailing. Just as frightening to the fishermen was the sight of a hare or the mentioning of its name just as they were about to sail. Hardiman, in his notes to Roderic O'Flaherty's *West or H-Iar Connaught* refers to this:

> *"So great is their aversion to a fox, hare, or rabbit, that they never so much as mention their names themselves, nor can they endure even to hear them named by others. If a fisherman of Claddagh happens to see one of these animals, or to hear its name mentioned, he would not on that day venture to sea; and the cause of this strange superstition they neither know themselves, nor can any one else account for".*

They went even further, because the same note states:

> *"It has been pleasantly remarked by Mr. O'Donovan, that if a man of the name of Fox, Hare, or Rabbit wished to settle among the Claddagh fishermen, he should change his name to Pike, Codde, or Salmon, or some such; for that his name would destroy the luck and happiness of this strange people".*

Fishermen at sea would not name a four-legged animal, prefering to call it by the strange term 'cold iron'. As well, it was not right to play music on board the Claddagh sailing boats. It was right, however, to bring oat-cakes, salt and ashes, because, according to the old tradition, there was a blessing in these items. According to the Ulster Journal of Archaeology of 1854:

> *"They* (the Claddagh fishermen) *believe that anything that has passed through fire is blessed. This must certainly be a remnant of the old fire-worship, when the glowing 'sun-burst' was the standard of Erin".*

Memories of another ancient ritual, that of burying a cat in the strand before going to fish, as an offering for favourable winds, seemed to have existed down to the start of the 19th century. Needless to say, the Fishery Commision of 1837 was happy to hear that such a heathen practice had long since ceased and instead, the fishermen looked for Divine intervention and protection in the blessing of the fleet by a Dominican priest at the start of the Autumn herring season.

Blessing of the Bay

Thus, began the famous custom of Blessing The Bay, which is still enacted down to the present day. Mary Banim gives the background to the origin of the blessing:

> *"From time immemorial this beautiful custom has been observed in Catholic countries, and the Claddagh men, who are a deeply religious people never begin their season's fishing until this blessing of God has been asked on their labour for the coming year: on themselves, that they may work with patience and diligence, and on the sea – the 'Fisherman's Garden', as they call it – that it may yield them an abundant harvest for the support of their wives and little ones. Very few, even of the Galway people, know of this custom, the Claddagh folk not wishing to make a show or parade of what is to them a very dear and sacred religious rite".*

The writer then goes on to describe the gathering of the boats and the race by skillful boatmen out to the fishing grounds off Mutton Island. The scene was rather spectacular:

> *"The race was over, a fishing-ground some miles out was reached; the anchor of the king's boat was cast, and then commenced a march past, not as exciting, but almost prettier in its way, than the race. It was strict etiquette that every craft should pass before that in which sat the priest, and as each vessel came flying up she bent and curved and swept round the admiral's, then took up her place in the immense circle that was gradually formed by the boats, and that closed in around until the priest, now bare-headed and wearing his stole, was exactly the centre of the ring of crowded boats, for not a man or boy remained at home that evening".*

Here, one wonders if any women participated in this special ceremony at sea up to then, because the writer only received her invitation to go at the very last moment from the king himself. Happily, she did go and following is her account of what happened next:

> *"When all were in place the king stood up, took off his hat and waved it. In one instant every human being in the fleet was bare-headed and on his knees, and the prayer began. First the Rosary and Litany were recited, and, oh! what deep faith and devotion, what earnest, imploring petitions were in the voices and in the gravely attentive faces of those men! The priest, used to touching scenes, could scarcely master his emotion as he sent up fervent prayers for God's blessing on the poor fishermen around him, while the responses of the soft, childish voices beside us mingled sweetly with the men's deep, earnest tones, coming like a chorus over the waters. The Rosary and Litany ended, the priest arose from his knees and read the service for the occasion, and, sprinkling the waves three times with holy water, he implored a blessing on them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost".*

Blessing of the Bay Today

Initially, it seems, hundreds of craft, both sail and rowing boats, took part in the Blessing of the Bay. As time passed, and the Claddagh fishing fleet declined due to competition from the trawlers, the number of boats attending the ceremony at sea decreased accordingly. These declining numbers were reflected in double sets of photographs published by the

Connacht Tribune on the 14th August, 1928; on the 5th September, 1933 with the Rev. Fr. Tighe, O.P., officiating; and on the 20th August, 1935. By 1941, as mentioned previously, only eighteen sailing craft took part, which also saw the first motor boats participate in the ceremony.

Ten boats ranging from a trawler to pleasure craft carried most of the people gathered along the Claddagh quays out beyond Mutton Island on Sunday, 15th August, 1993 when the Prior, Fr. Reynolds, P.P., performed the annual Blessing of the Bay. Sadly, only two of the old sailing craft, skippered by Pat Jennings and Colie Connolly, were present. One could only ponder on the scene enacted there, and on the countless Claddagh fishermen who came in the past to such a lonely place to pray for silver harvests yet to come.

Claddagh Dress - (1): Three Claddagh ladies, from the left, Mrs. Bridget King, Mrs. O'Donnell and Nora Flynn, model variations of the Claddagh shawl some years ago. (Courtesy Tom Lydon).

Claddagh Dress today - (2): Three more Claddagh ladies, from the left, Eileen Cloherty, Kate Curran and Molly Browne, model more Claddagh shawls at the Claddagh Exhibition in the Eyre Square Shopping Centre in 1992. (Courtesy Kate Curran and Jackie Duggan).

Claddagh Dress - (3): This young girl models a rather unusual style of foot-wear for the time. At least the shoed foot is nearest to the crab! (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Claddagh Dress (1870s) - (4): This drawing, from the *Illustrated London News,* shows how well dressed the boys of the Claddagh were at the time, despite the absence of shoes and the fact that all their clothes were homemade. The youngest, second from the left, wears a form of petticoat, so that the fairy folk would not distinguish him from the girls and sprint him away!

Claddagh Dress (1930s) - (5): This delightful study of a group of Claddagh girls shows all of them wearing shoes and happily playing with a headless teddy bear and pram. (Courtesy Tom Kenny).

Blessing of the Bay (1888) - 1: This sketch by Charles Whymper, published in Lovett's *Irish Pictures* , captures the marvellous moment when the Dominican Father blesses the waters. All around, seamen with bowed heads, fill the sturdy craft, and pray for a bountiful harvest in the year ahead.

Blessing of the Bay - 2: Martin Oliver with a full load in his new boat, *Patricia,* heads out to Mutton Island. (Courtesy Maureen Cunningham).

Blessing of the Bay - 3: Group aboard the trawler *Melrose* also head out to the bay. From left: ?, Paddy Curran, Eileen Lynch, ?, Michael Griffin, Paddy 'Ladneen' Curran and - Monaghan. (Courtesy Michael Griffin).

Blessing of the Bay (1940) - 4: The boats begin to gather at the Blessing area in August, 1940. (Courtesy Maura Fennell and John Monahan).

Blessing of the Bay (1940) - 5: With very little wind, some boats are rowed into position around the craft containing the Dominican priest. (Courtesy Maura Fennell and John Monahan).

Blessing of the Bay (1993) - 6: Crowds gather at the Claddagh quays awaiting boats to bring them out to the ceremony.

Blessing of the Bay (1993) - 7: A variety of boats gather off Mutton Island including a shrimp boat, Claddagh Hooker, trawler, sea scouter and a small open craft.

Blessing of the Bay (1993) - 8: Pat Jennings, one of the last of the great *Bádóirí* , sails past the boat containing clergy.

Blessing of the Bay (1993) - 9: Craft containing Fr. Reynolds, P.P., Eustás O Héadáin O.P. and altar boys from the Dominican Church, comes to a halt as the ceremony begins.

Chapter 8

"Forever Faithful" – The Story of the Claddagh Ring

The Claddagh Ring in Song

The Old Claddagh Ring, sure it was my grandmother's,
She wore it a lifetime and gave it to me;
All through the long years, she wore it so proudly,
It was made where the Claddagh rolls down to the sea.
What tales it could tell of trials and hardships,
And of grand happy days when the whole world could sing,
So away with your sorrow, it will bring love tomorrow,
Everyone loves it, the Old Claddagh Ring.

With the crown and the crest to remind me of honour,
And clasping the heart that God's blessing would bring,
The circle of gold always kept us contented,
"Twas true love entwined in the Old Claddagh Ring.
As she knelt at her prayers and thought of her dear ones,
Her soft, gentle smile would charm a king;
And on her worn hand as she told me the story,
You could see the bright glint of the Old Claddagh Ring.

It was her gift to me and it made me so happy,
With this on my finger my heart it would sing;
No king on his throne could be half so happy
As I am when I'm wearing my Old Claddagh Ring.
When the angels above call me up to heaven,
In the heart of the Claddagh their voices will sing
Saying "Away with your sorrow, you'll be with us tomorrow,
Be sure and bring with you the Old Claddagh Ring".

The words of this delightful song by Patrick B. Kelly perhaps best indicate the depth of feeling the Claddagh people have for the ring which bears the name of their village. Professor Etienne Rynne in his *Tourist Trail of Old Galway,* suggests that its long and unique association with the Claddagh gives it its famous name, although it belongs to a more widespread group called 'Faith' or 'Fede' finger-rings dating back to Roman times. It was the only type of ring the Claddagh people wore continuously, and it was the custom of each generation to hand it down to another as a marriage heirloom.

Design and Significance

The Fede type of finger-rings according to Professor Rynne:

> *"are distinguished by having the bezel* (rim) *cut or cast in the form of two clasped hands, symbolising trust or plighted troth (promise of marriage). There are several variants of the fede ring, the commonest being that in which the hands clasp a heart between them. The variant to which the name 'Claddagh Ring' has been given is that in which the clasped heart is surmounted by a crown".*

Thus, the three main components in the design of the Claddagh Ring are two hands acting as terminals to the rim, the heart and finally the crown. Each of these convey its own special meaning to the proud owner as Cecily Joyce points out in her book, *The Claddagh Ring Story:*

> *"The Claddagh ring motif has been explained in the phrase or posy 'Let love and friendship reign': the hand signifing faith (or plighted troth), the heart signifying love (charity), the crown signifying honour, loyalty, or 'hope of future glory'."*

Varieties of the Claddagh Ring

Slight changes in the shapes of its three components lead to variations of the Claddagh Ring. In general, according to Paul Duffy, a leading Galway numismatist, the older rings were made from soft pure gold and the heart was larger and narrower than the modern version. As a result, the crown was made wider and lower in depth. A lot, however, depended on the skill of the craftsman and the amount of gold used was also a factor in the composition of the ring.

Some concept of the wide variation in the design of the Claddagh Ring is given by Cecily Joyce in her book, which contains plates illustrating rings in the National Museum of Ireland, those in the Honourable Garech Browne Collection and a selection from Dillon's Jewellers in Galway, complete with appropriate data concerning each example.

Fr. George Quinn in an article entitled 'The Claddagh Ring' in the Mantle, also lists seven slight variations in the design of the ring. Perhaps the most interesting was the heavier type he classed as the 'Country Claddagh Ring', which was used in Connemara, the Aran Islands and as far north as the Joyce Country. In all cases, however, the three main component parts, hands, heart and crown were present.

Early Makers of the Claddagh Ring

Cecily Joyce gives an account of the various Galway goldsmiths involved in making the Claddagh Ring. The first to do so may have been Richard Joyce about whom Professor Rynne states:

> *"The earliest examples that can be dated are stamped R.I., the initials of Richard Joyce, a goldsmith working in Galway about 1700. Two main varieties of Claddagh Ring are made, one with a high and the other with a low crown, and they are made in three main sizes, for men, women and children. Their manufacture is by the cire perdue, or lost wax, process".*

Cecily Joyce also provides a list of goldsmith or jeweller marks from the latter part of the 17th century, starting with Richard Joyce who worked in Galway *circa* 1689-1737. After him, it seems, according to Dr. Kurt Ticher in an article in the *Antique Dealers and Collectors Guide,* 1980, interest waned in the manufacture of the Claddagh Ring until it was revived by George Robinson a generation or more later.

Andrew Robinson, Austin French, Nicholas Burdge, John Shadwell and Thomas Dillon, who set up business in Galway in 1750, are others mentioned by Cecily Joyce whose marks appear on these early Claddagh Rings. Dudley Westropp, according to Fr. Quinn, listed other goldsmiths of the time including Martin Lain and Laurence Coleman in 1784, Francis Dowling and Michael O'Meara in 1785, William Leatham in 1786 and James Kelly in 1799. However, the Robinsons and Dillons were the more important makers of the early Claddagh Rings.

As well, Fr. George Quinn notes:

> *"There were many other goldsmiths also who made this ring but left it unstamped because they used gold guineas and would have to account for their sources of gold and consequently did not stamp them".*

This unauthorised manufacture of Claddagh Rings also extended down to more recent times during the Forties and Fifties when amateur craftsmen bored and then shaped old silver half-crowns into rather crude silver versions of the ring.

Origins of the Claddagh Ring

No clear source can be identified for the origin of the Claddagh Ring. Suggested beginnings in Spain, Brittany and elsewhere are rather frowned on by those who see beauty only in the realms of legend. Yet, legend stimulates the imagination and adds a little extra incentive to the thirst for knowledge. What could be more exciting then, than a high-flying eagle dropping a golden prototype of the Claddagh Ring into the lap of Margaret Joyce? Margaret, wife of Oliver Óg French, mayor of Galway in 1596, was thus rewarded according to tradition, for her charitable work in building bridges throughout Connacht by this strange divine messenger!

A more plausible story again tells how the aforementioned Richard Joyce returned to his native Galway from slavery in Algeria after the intervention of William III of England in that country's affairs. Richard, while a captive, was trained to work as a goldsmith and became so expert at his craft that his Moorish master offered him his daughter in marriage and half his wealth if he remained in Algeria. Seemingly, Atlantic winds and rain were more appealing than the desert heat, however, and so we find Richard back in Galway after 1689 working as a master craftsman in silver and gold. If tradition is correct, he was also busy making the first Claddagh Rings, modelled perhaps on examples from North Africa.

Thus, the work of angels or Moorish inspiration are popular versions of the origin of the Claddagh Ring. The failure of the scientific world to discover its true beginnings only adds to the charm and romance of this special ring. Not surprisingly, its mystery and symbolism made it a favourite among a society as ancient as the Claddagh.

Special Meaning to the Claddagh

The ring, with its connotations of faith, love, honour, and charity, appealed to the special values of the old Claddagh village and for many a household, the ring became the biggest investment after the purchase of the family boat. Kurt Ticher describes what happened:

> *"The poor fishermen of the Claddagh made what was for them a great sacrifice to obtain their rings, letting the goldsmiths know how much they could afford to pay. They in turn would have fixed the caratage to bring the ring within the customer's means. In the end, a proud people to whom £3 was a virtual fortune, poverty dictated the fineness of the gold".*

Once acquired, however, the ring became a family heirloom and, in the seemingly matriarchial system of the Claddagh at the time, became the property of the women. Although worn initally as a symbol of friendship, its main function centred on the marriage process. Fr. George Quinn explains:

> *"The ring was used by these people as a marriage ring and even down to the present day the ring amongst them has special age-old customs. For instance, it is not right for a Claddagh person to buy a ring, they must obtain it as a gift. If married, the crown must be put nearest the nail. If unmarried, the heart is being presented; it is free to be captured, so the crown is worn nearest the knuckle. It is still a popular ring amongst these people".*

There were variations to these rules, however, and Hartmann Jewellers of 29 William Street, Galway, one of the city's traditional makers of the Claddagh Ring, provide customers with these instructions:

> *"Wear this ring on your right hand, with heart turned outwards and the world will known your heart has not yet been won. Wear it on your right hand, with heart turned inwards and it shows you have friendship, and love is being considered. But when worn on the left hand with heart turned inwards, it means two loves have joined forever".*

Perhaps, the strangest custom of all concerns the passing of the Claddagh Ring from one generation to another. While most commentators stated that the ring was passed from mother to daughter and used both as betrothal and marriage rings, an older custom is indicated in the first two lines of Patrick B. Kelly's song:

> *"The Old Claddagh Ring, sure it was my grandmother's,*
> *She wore it a lifetime and gave it to me;"*

As Paul Duffy points out, the grandmother passed her ring to her eldest granddaughter on the morning of the latter's marriage. She, in turn, gave it to her husband to be, who then handed it back to her after the marriage ceremony. If, as sometimes happened, the grandmother died before her eldest granddaughter married, then the ring was held over for the happy event. The mother, of course, held her own Claddagh Ring for the wedding of her grand daughter. In effect, the ring passed immediately between three generations of the Claddagh family, and, at any one time, there were two Claddagh Rings in each family household in the Old Claddagh.

Due to various factors, however, the old system was never fully sustainable and internal family pressures as well as external problems such as famine and emigration took their toll. As regards the latter, W. Dillon states in an article entitled, "The 'Claddagh' Ring", written in Vol. 4 (1904) of the *Journal of the The Galway Archaeological & Historical Society*:

> *"But numbers of these rings, so great that it is difficult to realise it, came from the Claddagh in years gone by. I have been informed by Mr. Kirwan that after the famine years '46 and '47 he had left on his hands 'Claddagh' rings, on which he had advanced cash, in his pawnbroking business, to the extent of £500, and which were chiefly pawned by people of the Claddagh, who were then emigrating in hundreds: Mr Kirwan seeing no prospect of them being ever redeemed, realised his money by selling them as old gold to be broken up and consigned to the melting-pot".*

Sadly, as the ancient heirlooms bubbled in the melting heat, a very special piece of Claddagh life vanished in the steaming liquid. Today, not many of the old rings survive. The trials and hardships of their owners are but history now and new Claddagh Rings gleam and glitter in a different world.

Ring known Internationally

Today, the Claddagh Ring is known across the globe. It took some time, however, to achieve this fame but presenting them as gifts to kings, queens, and presidents was an excellent marketing ploy. Fr. George Quinn notes this in his article:

> *"The ring became popular outside the Claddagh about the middle of the last century, especially as it was claimed to the the only ring ever made in Ireland to be worn by Queen Victoria – she probably purchased one for Albert also – and later Edward VII".*

T. Dillons & Sons, makers of the Claddagh Ring since 1750, supplied them to Queen Mary also and to many other persons of the highest distinction. In 1963, Cornelius Faller, of *Stephen Faller Ltd.,* Williamsgate Street, Galway's second oldest but largest manufacturers of the ring since 1879, made a presentation of one to John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, to mark his visit to the city. In 1984, when President Ronald Reagan visited Galway, he, too, was presented with a specially commissioned 18 carat gold Claddagh Ring as a gift from the city. Such high profile presentations brought maximum publicity for the Claddagh Ring and ensured its increasing popularity today.

Cecily Joyce suggests that the ring had other attributes also which were especially attractive to a changing world:

> *"The Claddagh ring, because of its tradition, significance and design, today is an internationally recognised token of love, friendship, honour, loyalty, freedom and hope".*

This has lead to an ever increasing demand for the Claddagh Ring and an entire industry, both in the retail and manufacturing sectors, at home and abroad, has grown up around the simple concepts of the ancient ring. In Galway, Paul Faller, continuing in the family tradition, is busily involved in new designs and adaptations of the Claddagh Ring, while Hartmann's chief craftsman, Michael Griffin, has deep roots in the old village itself. The Old Claddagh may be gone now but a little bit of it will gleam for ever on the special bands of gold worn throughout the world.

DILLON'S CLADDAGH RINGS

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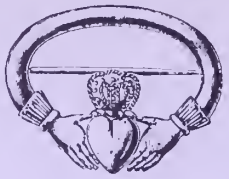

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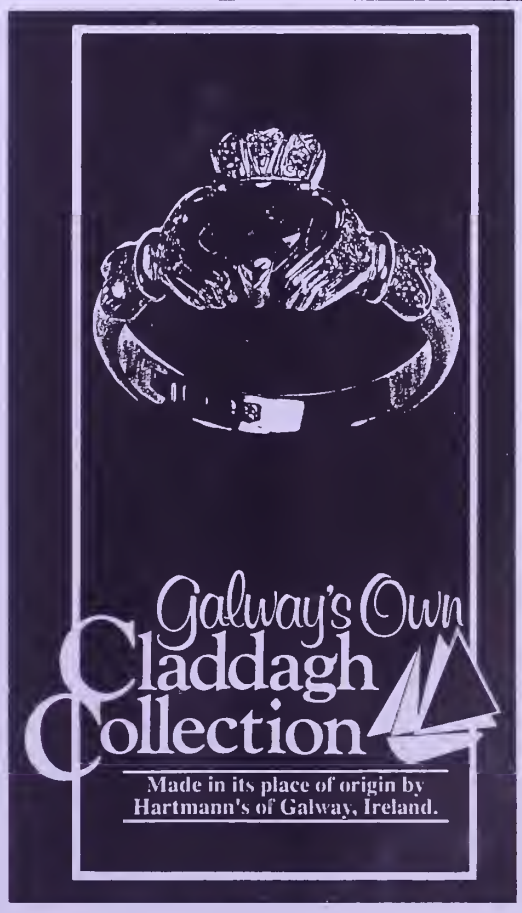


Advertising the Claddagh Ring: Dillons Advertisement in the *Illustrated & Descriptive Souvenir of Galway City* published by the Forthill Bazaar committee in 1915 and below current Faller and Hartmann advertisements.

The Claddagh Ring encompasses the past: A delightful photographic study by Brendan Lawlor shows an old Claddagh Ring framing a quiet scene down by the Claddagh. (Courtesy Brendan Lawlor).

Chapter 9

"A Spot of Recreation" - The Story of the Claddagh at Play

The Good Times

"..... or to sit beside a turf-fire in a cabin,
and to watch the bare-foot gossoons at their play".

These lines from the 'New Galway Bay' by Arthur Colahan, when sung by Bing Crosby, paint a picture of peace and serenity, of times long since gone to seed in the meadows of the mind. They were good times also, for the fishing was excellent, and the trawlers had not yet begun to drag their webs of destruction along the sands of Galway Bay. The Claddagh was at peace with itself as the 19th century dawned and the sounds of laughter and joy often drifted eastwards across the Quay Stream.

The children, as mentioned previously, played their games of hide-and-seek among the maze of thatched houses, or sailed their tiny boats in the shallow lough at 'The Swamp'. The more adventurous learned to swim and fish from the shore while some were eager to master the ancient custom of casting stones from slings.

19th Century Amusements

By the end the 1810s when Hardiman produced his *History of Galway,* the Claddagh was already noted for its joviality and amusements. St. Patrick's Day in the Claddagh, in the early 19th century, for example, was a particularly happy time. Somehow, by not a little effort, the locals were able to stretch the feastday of the national saint into a rather long, enjoyable week. Hardiman may have participated in some of the festivities because he was quite conversant with much of what took place as he happily notes:

> *"Drinking, dancing, and listening to music, are their principal amusements: the feast of St. Patrick is one of their grand gala days. After pouring copious libations* (poitín?) *to the honour of the patron saint during the forenoon of this festival, they assemble towards evening in groups, to partake of plentiful repasts prepared at their favorite public houses. Here they and their families continue for two or three days in on one continued scene of merriment and ebriety, and never, during the happy octave, so much as think of going to sea".*

While not at sea themselves, they allowed no one else to fish their waters, and, eventually this helped lead to the downfall of fishing in the village. Nor were their festivities confined solely to special church feast days of the year, as Hardiman comments:

> *"At other times the Sunday and holiday evenings are entirely devoted to dancing; and, though these people are passionately fond of such music as itinerant pipers and fiddlers can afford, yet it has been remarked that even a passable song has never been heard amongst them".*

It is interesting to note the lack of musical ability attributed to these 19th century Claddagh people by Hardiman. Perhaps, they considered the sound of music a bad omen in their fishing. Certainly, there was a ban on having music on their boats, and one particular crew who broke the rule, failed, according to tradition, to return from a fishing trip.

Home-grown sounds of fiddles, harps and pipes were rather rare among the homes of the Claddagh, for the villagers had only ears, it seems, for sweeter tunes. Thus, many an outside wall sported a birdcage and many a home prided itself on the quality of the singing of its favourite cagebird. Today, only the twitter of sparrows ring around the neat gardens of the Claddagh, where once the notes of the goldfinch vied with the cackle of the village geese.

The lack of musical ability among the people of the Claddagh was certainly compensated by their love of dancing. J. Mc E., writing in the 1854 volume of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* is quite emphatic about this point:

> *"As far as I can ascertain they have preserved no important traditions nor poems; their songs are the same as we may find in the West generally. Many of them have fine voices; and they are celebrated as dancers. A Northern has no idea of the extraordinary activity, grace, energy, and 'bashful assurance' that characterize a set of dancers on the earthen floor of a Claddagh hut – and they may indeed dance well if the ejaculatory sympathy of the company has any magnetic influence on their movements".*

Bonfire-Night Festivities

As well as the Sabbath Day and Holy Days, about sixty church feastdays were observed by the Claddagh people. The reason for so many, as mentioned by a fisherman at the Fishery Commission of 1835, was to continue the ancient customs of the village.

One of the most important of these was the lighting of bonefires on St. John's Night to which the Claddagh people, as if confirming their reverence to the old traditions, celebrated to the full in their own peculiar fashion. Again, we have Hardiman to thank for giving us the following account:

> *"The Nativity of St. John the Baptist (24th June) they celebrate by a very peculiar kind of pageantry. On the evening of that day the young and old assemble at the head of the village; and their mayor, whose orders are decisive, adjusts the rank, order and precedence of this curious procession. They then set out, headed by a band of music, and march with loud and continued huzzas and acclamations of joy, accompanied by crowds of people, through the principal streets and suburbs of the town: the young men all uniformly arrayed in short white jackets, with silken sashes, their hats ornamented with ribbons and flowers, and upwards of sixty or seventy of the number bearing long poles and standards with suitable devices, which are in general emblematic of their profession. To heighten the merriment of this festive scene, two of*

> *the stoutest disguised in masks, and entirely covered with party-coloured rags, as 'merrymen', with many antic tricks and gambols, make way for the remainder. In the course of their progress they stop with loud cheerings and salutations opposite the houses of the principal inhabitants, from whom they generally receive money on the occasion".*

Thus, it is interesting to note, that on the Eve of St. John's, or Bonfire-Night, the Claddagh people dropped their native shyness and ventured forth into the town with a degree of ostentation completely out of character with their usual reticence. Some powerful influences were 'abroad' that night, it seems, fanned by the flames of numerous bonfires and none more so than in the Claddagh. Hardiman continues the tale:

> *"Having at length regained their village, they assemble in groups, dancing round, and sometimes leaping and running through their bonfires, never forgetting to bring home part of the fire, which they consider sacred; and thus the night ends as the day began, in one continued scene of mirth and rejoicing. That the entire of this exhibition, though unknown to the actors, is a remnant of an ancient pagan rite, is evident to any one acquainted with the early history of this country".*

How ancient, we will never know and even though bad times followed, the festivities associated with Bonfire-Night continued right down to the demolition of the village in the 1930s. By then, the dancing around the bonfire took place at the 'Caroline', an open space at the town end of Fairhill. Here, on one particular night in the late twenties, Kate Curran remembers the excitement engendered when Stephen Ruane, the Uileen piper from Shantalla Road came along to play. So great was the music, the dancing and the 'craic' that the celebrations around another bonfire beside 'The Concrete' at the Spanish Arch petered out rather quickly, as Kate and the other youngsters of Long Walk and Quay Street hurried across the bridge to the disco of their day.

Story Telling

In the Old Claddagh home, the hearth with its black hob and flickering firelight was the focus of family life. Here sat the elders of the household while the younger generation sat in an arc around them eager for the warmth of the fire on dark Winter nights. There were stories to be told, and the grandparents, with their vast store of memories and tales of ancient times were valued members of the household, long before the wonders of electricity shattered the myths of the night.

Ghost stories were especially popular just then, for the night cast its darkest mantle across the Old Claddagh village, where only the weak glow from a candle or gas lamp outlined the little windows in the black of the night. The *Cúnga Mór* (Big Corner) at the *Garra Glas* was a place to be avoided in the dark and nobody crossed the Claddagh Bridge after midnight for fear of the 'gliomach'.

Typical of such stories is the following one recorded on audio-tape by Michael Griffin:

> *"Tomaisín, a nice man, had a few drinks one night in Greene's pub at the Spanish Arch. As he was about to go home, someone was supposed to have come up to him and asked him if he would have another drink. Tomaisín looked down and saw a 'club'*

foot on yer man! As they were walking up towards the bridge, at the sloping wall, yer man gave Tomaisín a hicker and he fell over it, down the steps and into the water. He held on to the railings as something was trying to pull him down further into the current. Very early in the morning, Peter, who as on his way to work in the town heard the shouts of Tomaisín coming from the water and he got afraid. However, Tomaisín saw him through the gaps in the iron bridge and called out his own name to Peter. Peter got courage then and went down the steps and as soon as he left his hands on Tomaisín, he was released. People said it was the devil or the 'gliomach' that had a hold of Tomaisín!"

Naturally, many of the Claddagh stories about the supernatural dwelt with happenings at sea. Chris Flaherty, now a retired policeman in Preston in England, in a letter to the author, wrote the following:

"If the time was right, after he had a few jars, my grandfather would tell me the story of the White Ship. As the story goes, many a local lad was lost in the bay after he saw her. This phantom ship was regarded as evil and the cause of a number of tragedies. You see, when more modern boats began to use Galway Bay, sometimes in particularly thick fog, the local fishermen would follow them in order to hasten their journey; and believing such boats to be controlled by modern navigational equipment, they felt safe ..... but my grandfather used to say that they did it at their peril. For a number of such local boats did follow the said strange White Ship and foundered on the rocks with the tragic loss of life. Having been at sea in an air sea rescue launch off the Cornish coast in fog, I can understand how the imagination can work overtime, and a drifting white mist can, in fog, play tricks and look like another sea-going vessel".

Michael Griffin's grandfather told about the mysterious figure seen on board the empty Dingle trawler on 'the roads' off Mutton Island, while some can recount the terrible tale of the four white-shirted boatmen rowing at the dead of night in the Claddagh Basin.

Perhaps, the greatest story-teller of them all, however, was Bridget Costelloe from the Claddagh who brought her talents to the Oireachtas in Dublin at the start of the century. Naturally, she was a prize winner there for the gift of storytelling lasted longer in the Claddagh than most places. Sadly, this most ancient of the arts died with the demolition of village in the Thirties for stories lose their flavour in the presence of the iron range and aluminium kettle.

Sporting Activities

As mentioned above, one of the earliest athletic activities indulged in by the young people of the Claddagh was the ancient 'sport' of casting stones with a sling. This, it seems, was a favourite Irish method of warfare, which long outlasted the use of the bow and arrow. The 1854 *Ulster Journal of Archaeology Ethnological Sketch* refered to this also:

"..... casting pebbles from the sling is an amusement and a mode of warfare peculiar to the Claddagh men at the present day. Since the famine, this and other sports have been held in abeyance; but it was formerly usual for them to have 'slinging-matches';

and when a man was able to strike a shilling as far as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot. Certainly they have long been celebrated for their skill in this ancient exercise. Whether the sling was introduced into Ireland by the Phoenicians, or whether it was in use all over Europe at one time, is a question for the Archaeologist. At all events there are many points of similarity between these poor men who lately drove back English troops with the sling, and the race of that youth who slew Goliath with a pebble".

It is interesting to note, that in his youth in the 1920's, Michael Griffin remembers how he and other youths used the sling to knock down seagulls perched on the mast of the old iron barque, *Nordly Set,* as she lay beached on the sandy shore off Nimmo's Pier. This, in a way, was rather daring, because the older fishermen regarded such birds as re-incarnations of their ancestors!

Hurling in the Claddagh

By this time, however, the young men of the Claddagh were diverting their youthful energies into other areas. With less fishing being done and consequently more time on their hands, many took up the old game of hurling, which was thriving especially in the Bohermore and College Road areas of the city. In time, matches took place between the various town teams in the reclaimed area of the Swamp. Perhaps, the fervour and the colourful atmosphere of such contests are best seen in Walter Macken's book, *Rain on the Wind* when Mico and Twacky took on the might of 'College boys' on that cold March Sunday after last Mass.

Enthusiasm also filled the veins of many the Claddagh's bare-footed youngsters as they played their matches in the Big Grass area in front of the houses. Even the village geese kept their distance then as the home-made sliotar flashed across the green bumpy sward and the clash of the ash was heard in the Claddagh more and more.

So serious had the hurling mania captured the village that the Fr. Tom Burke Hurling Club, which was founded in 1899, was a formidable force by the 1920s. After Galway won the All-Ireland title in 1923, intense rivalry grew between the different areas in the town and culminated in the calamitous Galway City Hurling League Final which took place on Sunday, 3rd November, 1929.

Over four thousand people packed the Sportsground for this rousing encounter between the Galway City No.1 team and the Claddagh team but the match ended in a riot after only fourteen minutes of play. By then, Claddagh were leading by 1-1 to 1-0, with a goal from James Carrick and the point for Claddagh coming from Eddie Moore. Mick King scored City's goal. When the crowd invaded the pitch, the referee, Seamus Malone from Kilrush, had no option but to award the match to the Claddagh team. According to the *Connacht Tribune* report:

"Sticks, crutches, shawls, hurleys, fists and hats were raised in the excitement as the dispute (of which the referee was the central figure) grew hotter..... . W. Curran, the captain, was given possession of the cup and was seized and carried shoulder high towards the road. To the strains of martial music from the band of the Amalgamated

Transport Workers' Union the procession moved off in a body nearly two thousand strong, through the city and on to the Claddagh via Dominic St. In the Claddagh bonfires blazed in celebration of the victory. The players were escorted to the Claddagh hall and the crowd then dispersed".

Sadly, the affair seemed to knock the hurling heart out of the Claddagh, and, as James Casserly, an expert on Galway G.A.A. affairs, stated in a lecture to The Old Galway Society in May, 1992, *"hurling declined in the Claddagh after that".*

Soccer in the Claddagh

While the sporting interest of the Claddagh waned in relation to the Gaelic game of hurling, its spirit looked elsewhere and found the game of soccer. Due mostly to the influence of many of the young men who served in the British navy, soccer made its presence felt as the interest in hurling declined. One of the first soccer teams founded in the native village was the great Cladonians AFC who really came into their own in the 1930's. Perhaps one of the greatest achievements was winning the Schweppes Cup during the 1936-37 season.

The team also qualified to participate in what was then the Free State Junior Cup. Perhaps, the best remembered match they played at this higher level took place in the Sligo grounds against the eventual winners, Killybegs, from County Donegal.

Other soccer teams associated with the Claddagh were Fairhill Unknowns, Grattan United, Claddagh Rangers, Shamrock Athletic and, of course, Rovers, who as Galway Rovers launched Galway into League of Ireland success. While Galway United are the Galway representatives at the highest level now, Rovers still continue to field underage teams with the Claddagh Hall as their base and South Park as their playing area.

Amusements and Recreation in the New Claddagh

While the New Claddagh estate took over twenty years to complete, much disruption obviously took place in the life of the people there. It takes time for a new suburb to settle down and the New Claddagh was no exception. Although most of the former villagers were rehoused in the new estate, different neighbours and strange houses slowed the integration process. It was to be some time before a true community spirit reigned again and sport and recreation came to file the idle hours away.

The Swamp – South Park

The new estate was lucky in having a flat, muddy area in the shape of 'The Swamp' on its doorstep. With a £500 grant from the Carnegie Trust in 1931, the site, which for a period contained the city dump, was eventually developed into a number of playing pitches. A generation before, at a cost of £450, a huge half-mile racing track had been constructed in the shape of a rectangle with rounded corners around the perimeter of The Swamp. This followed the promptings of Stephen Gwynn, the Parliamentry Representative for Galway, who obtained a substantial grant for the reclamation and drainage of the swampy area itself. Since then much development work has been undertaken in providing a municipal park devoted entirely to sporting activities not just for the Claddagh area but for the entire city. During the course of this development, this fine amenity area became known officially as South Park.

This huge open park area has hosted countless sporting activities ranging from Gaelic football and soccer matches, inter-firm competitions and school games. Perhaps, the strangest events associated with it were various race meetings involving cart horses and their like. These were revived in the first annual Claddagh Racing Festival which commenced in 1971.

Claddagh Festival

Each Claddagh Festival saw the local people at their best. The many facets involved in organising such a festival, which usually took place at the start of August during the week following the Galway Races, called for community involvement of the highest order. It got it because with the coming of the Seventies there was need for a new community hall. Elgy Gillespie writing in the *Irish Times* of 19th October, 1971 explains:

> *"Father Gannon explained that the old Claddagh Hall, beautiful though it was, was bursting at the seams what with dancing classes on Saturdays and billiards all weekend. Besides they needed a proper day centre for the pensioners. They wanted a festival to get funds for a new building".*

The first festival started in style with the proclaiming of Martin Oliver as King of the Claddagh. *The Galway Advertiser* of 5th August, 1971 takes up the story:

> *"Amidst scenes of joy and jubilation Mr. Martin Oliver was proclaimed King of the Claddagh on Sunday last in the presence of Civic and Religious leaders headed by his Worship the Mayor of Galway, Cllr. Michael Smyth. The ceremonies commenced with a parade from the Fairgreen headed by a colour party from the Dominican troop of Catholic Boy Scouts and the Galway Fife and Drum Band".*

Then followed Mass in St. Mary's and afterwards, as the new king came ashore from his Hooker at Nimmo's Pier, he was greeted by the Mayor and Corporation with the Municipal Sword and Mace before proceeding to the Claddagh Hall. Here, the traditional seafood meal at the start of the festival was served, with Mrs. Moore and Mrs. McDonagh getting special praise for their efforts. The report concluded by stating:

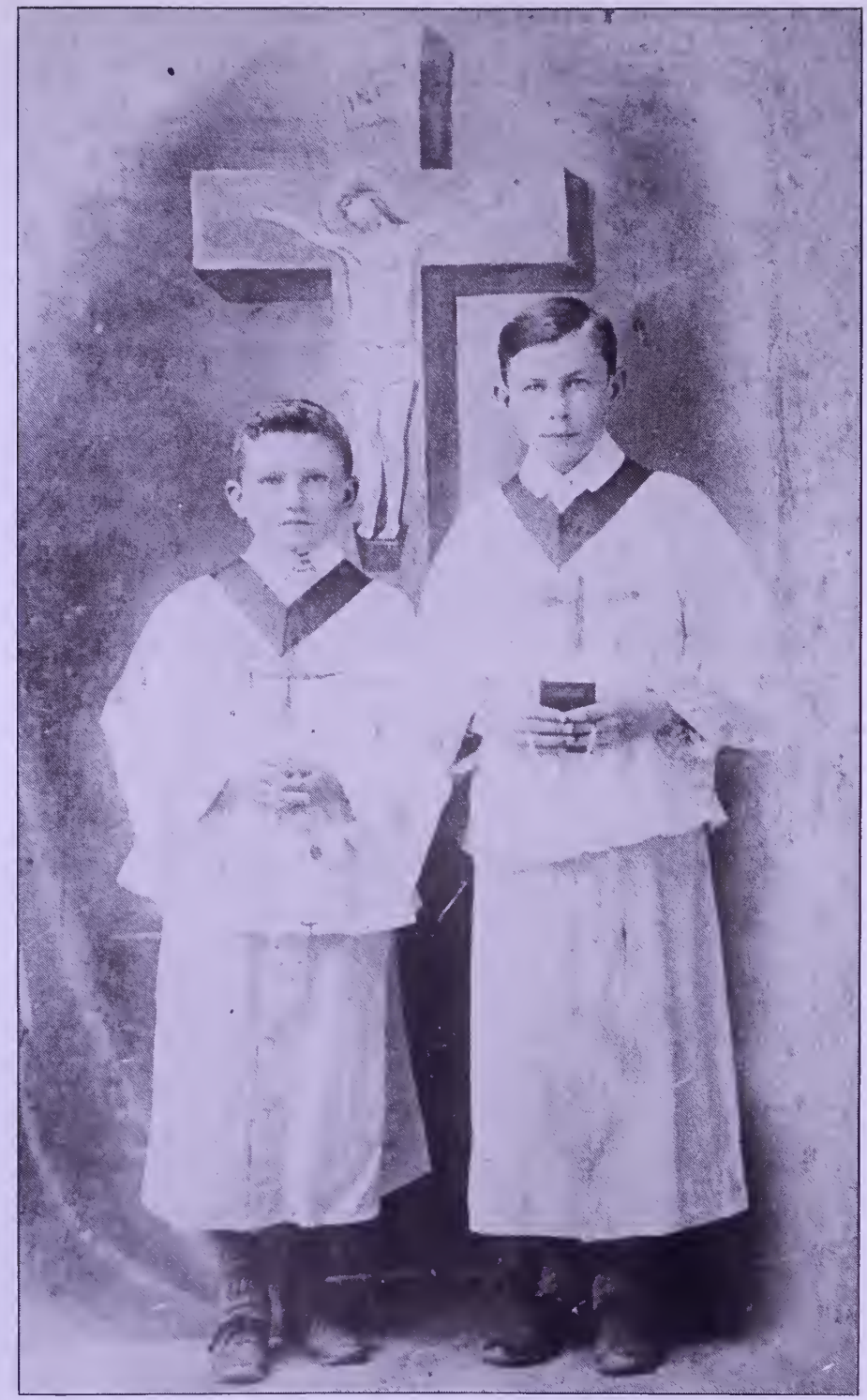
> *"This was a great day indeed – a day to remember for the Claddagh and a special day in Galway's calendar of memories. The week of Festivites continues and despite the changeable weather, every activity has been an outstanding success".*

The activities, which contributed to the success of the venture over the years consisted of cart-horse, pony and donkey races, with the latter being by far the most popular and unpredictable. The bookies usually had a field day in every sense of the word. Other events such as the choosing of the Claddagh Princess (Siobhán Griffin from Rahoon was the first), Fancy Dress and dancing in the large marque, and especially the closing dance at the end of the festival, usually ensured its success both from the monetary point of view and the promotion of community spirit in the New Claddagh.

Such spirit was manifested in other ways also and the success of the Claddagh entries in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade are evidence of this. In recent times, and especially during the 1988 fifth centenary celebrations of the coming of the Dominicans to Galway,

that spirit has shone brighter than ever with the whole community participating in a whole range of events during that memorable year.

That shyness, so long a pecularity of the people of the Old Claddagh, is long since gone now and one need only look at the individual successes of Molly Browne, one of Galway's greatest singers, and newcomer, Kenneth Long. One should not forget also Seán McGlory of film fame or Ray McBride of Fairhill, who has performed so well on both stage and screen in recent times. As well, the recent successes of the Claddagh Tops in the John Player Tops of the Town Competition recall another time long since past, when a group of strolling Claddagh players invaded the town on Bonfire Night and held its citizens spellbound. The Claddagh has come a long way since its people danced on earthen floors and cast stones with slings for entertainment.



Two Dominican Altar Boys: Jack and Paddy O'Donnell c. 1920.

The youth at play in the Claddagh: The two 'teams' and supporters line up for their photograph to be taken before play commences in the 'Big Grass'. From the left, back row: Bridie Oliver, Hubert Higgins, Charlie Carr, Maisie Oliver, Peggy Rushe, Jimmy Riddell, John Lydon, Jim Quirke, Stephen Rushe, Paddy Curran, and Brod Moran. Front row: Paddy Curran, Patrick Folan, Martin Oliver, Joe Cloherty, Joe Igoe, Colman Connolly, Berteen Lydon (Harte) and Bridget O'Donnell. (Courtesy Tom Kenny and Tom Lydon).

The match is on: Bare feet mix with boots on the large grassy area in front of the houses. The village geese have wisely fled the scene. (Courtesy Tom Kenny and Tom Lydon).

The match is over: The players and followers take a well-earned rest. (Courtesy Tom Lydon).

Hurling in the Old Claddagh (1923): The Fr. Tom Burke hurling team of the Claddagh, winners of the City Challenge Cup. Back row from left: John King, Tim McHugh, Jimmy Hurney, Martin Gannon, ?, Paddy Curran, Martin Conneely, Michael John Noone. Middle row: Tom Griffin, ?, John Joe McNamara, James Carrick, Michael Joe Clancy. Front row: Paddy Kelly, Adlie Hynes, Mick Griffin, Johnny Griffin. (Courtesy Patricia O'Gorman).

Winners again in 1929: The Fr. Tom Burke team which won the City Challenge Cup in the hotly contended final in the Sportsground. Back row from left: Martin Mullaly, Peter John Curran, Willie O'Donnell, Dominick Curran, James Carrick, James Moore. Third row: John Joe McNamara, John Costello, John Griffin, Tom O'Dea, Martin Griffin, John Moore, Martin Gannon, Paddy Curran, John O'Brien, Jim Sharkey, Tom Higgins, Michael John Noone. Second row: John Geary, Tom Griffin, Willie Curran (Capt.), Eddie Moore, Peter Griffin. Front row: Addlie Hynes, Geoff Murphy.

Soccer in the Claddagh: The Cladonians team who were winners of the Schwepps Cup in 1936. Back row, from left: Jim Connell, Matin Connell, Paddy Cubbard, Dick Ebbs, Jack Connor, Frank Fitzgerald, Eddie Cloherty. Front: Josie Flaherty, Jack O'Donnell, Martín 'Mate' Lydon, Bobbie Cantwell, Thomas Flaherty, Thomas Lydon. (Courtesy Eileen Cloherty)

More Soccer still: A great day in the life of Galway Rovers with the opening of their new clubhouse in the old slated premises at the top of what once was former Dogfish Lane Three former mayors are present including Paddy OFlaherty, Pat McNamara and Josie Owens. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell).

The Claddagh on wheels: Fun time during St. Patrick Day Parades when Claddagh entries swept all before them. One of the best depicted Claddagh Fish Market 1900 with ancilliary customs thrown in for good measure. Centre piece was Mary Julia Browne at her spinning wheel. (Courtesy Mary Julia Browne).

Close-up of two St. Patrick's Day parade participants: Deborah Kilkelly and Paddy Cooke 'on stage' on a St. Patrick's Day float. (Courtesy Kate Curran).

Claddagh 'Royal Family': Appearing in the Claddagh Coach during a St. Patrick's Day parade are the Claddagh Royal Family of King 'Ladneen' Currran and his Queen, Kate, Claddagh Princess, Siobhán Griffin, and her attendants Joan Cooke and Ann Finnerty. The coachman is Tom Feeney with his sons Paul and Gerard. (Courtesy Tom Feeney) .

The Claddagh Races: No. 13 is in the lead as the horses round the bend and the excitement rises. (Courtesy Eamon Mitchell) .

Chapter 10

"For the Strangers Came . . ." — The Story of the Claddagh in Print

Official Writings

For the strangers came and tried to teach us their ways,
They scorned us for being what we are.
But they might as well go chasing after moon beams,
Or light a penny candle from a star.

These are strong sentiments expressed by Arthur Colahan in his song, 'Galway Bay'. They are proud words, of course, and in relation to the Old Claddagh, they seemed to hold true up to the dawn of the 19th century. The Vikings and the Normans had strutted across its pages of history, but the Claddagh was still a native place as James Hardiman sat down to write his monumental work on his adopted city.

Yet, the 19th century altered the face of continents and the proud fishing village by the Quay Stream quivered as the winds of change began to filter through its little lanes and pathways. Capt. Hurdis of the Royal Navy was in command, and, as his little band of workmen laid cobble stones and slanting gullies between the simple homes, the emerging modern world touched the heart of the Claddagh.

The stranger taught his ways with some success just then as the villagers enjoyed the advantages of their new cobbled streets. Not long afterwards, more strangers came to the seaward end of Fairhill and changed its character also. They were government people, coastguards, who came to erect a coastguard station and a line of cottages on rolling fields where the cries of seagulls and crashing waves were broken only by the sounds of a few cattle fairs each year.

These coastguards were welcomed initially for their help in times of distress at sea, as a new concept of marine safety entered the Claddagh mind. Attitudes changed, however, when the these new guardians of the coast were more interested in preventing smuggling rather than supporting the native fishermen in the long, drawn out trawler war. Of more importance, however, was the fact that, as they wrote their reports, aspects of the Claddagh appeared in official documents on a regular basis for the first time. The magic and the mystery of the village would never be the same again.

Not welcomed at all, it seems, was the arrival of a constabulary in a village where serious crime did not exist. Tradition sees the Claddagh king dealing with petty problems as they

occured, and so the setting up of a barracks there may not have been too popular at the time. Illicit affairs of the heart and the crime of theft were hardly ever noted in the village and the arrival of the police seemed a little premature.

Taken in the context of the time, however, it was a necessary move as opposition to the trawlers at the local quaysides grew. In 1832, for instance, police constable Martin Culkin was compensated to the amount of £3. 5s. damages sustained to his clothes at the Claddagh, while in the execution of his duty. The Claddagh was now appearing in official police records as well as newspapers for the first time.

The coast of Galway was also quite notorious for smuggling activities during the 18th and the 19th centuries. The Claddagh was not quite as innocent as it seemed, however, and Maurice Semple in his book, *Some Galway Memories,* sheds a little light on the situation:

> *"In the Galway Express for 23rd January 1869 the following report appears: ' On Sunday night at about 9 0' clock an extensive seizure of illicit whiskey took place at the Claddagh. It appears that Richard Jagoe, one of the Coast Guards, had some intimation that some whiskey would be landed there at night. In due time a boat appeared and soon after, a covered car, into which the whiskey was conveyed, and the car then went on to the Grattan Road. Constable Bruce and party pursued, and the car driver, fearing a seizure, disposed of three kegs, containing six gallons each, by throwing them off the car on to the sea beach. Owing to some unaccountable cause, which we do not know, the driver, horse, and car escaped, and nothing has been seized but merely the kegs containing the poteen".*

Despite such reporting, however, the Claddagh remained a place of mystery and romance to the Victorian mind. It was a place to visit, for nowhere else in the British Isles would one find a native colony with its own quaint language, its own king and distinctive wedding rings and boats, and even ancient customs mocking time itself. Many came to see this ancient enclave and some came especially to write about their experiences there. Some came to immortalise the quaintness of the village on canvas, while others arrived in later times to capture the magic of the moment in the camera lens.

Writing from the Heart

Already, many excerpts have been included in this work from those who wrote about aspects, both good and bad, of the Claddagh of their time. There were many others who did so also, as did poets and artists in their different media. To most, the Old Claddagh was a strange place, a place to be recorded. Some fell in love with its living history, while others glanced in its direction and simply walked by.

In any list of those who wrote about the Claddagh, James Hardiman, would certainly command attention. Not only was he one of the first to mention the Claddagh by name, his detailed notes on the ancient village were most comprehensive, most of which have been reproduced here under appropriate headings. While Arthur Young in 1780 mentioned the sea fishing aspect of the town, and De Lactonaye in his *A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland 1796-7* had eyes mostly on the Galway ladies, very little else appeared in print about Galway or the Claddagh before Hardiman's work.

In fact, Hardiman's *History of Galway* was the watershed in relation to the Claddagh for much of what he wrote about the fishing village appeared in subsequent works, often without accreditation. Thus, his revellers on Bonfire Night danced through the pages of many other works and his description of Claddagh clothes appeared in print long after the blue mantle went out of fashion.

Outside of trade directories, commission reports, census returns and various newspaper reports, the main writers already quoted include Inglis (1838), A Cosmopolite – Robert Allen (1840), William Makepeace Thackeray (1842), Francis B. Head (1852), An Oxonian – S. Reynolds Hole (1859), Sir William Wilde (1867), Richard Lovett (1888), Mary Banim (1892), Stephen Gwynn (1909), H. V. Morton (1930), Fr. Leo Ward (1939) Richard Hayward (1952), Domhnall O Caoimh (1959), Maurice Semple (1969 *et alii*), Walter Macken, Etienne Rynne (1977), Richard J. Scott (1983), works by the present author (1985 *et alii*), Cecily Joyce (1990) and Eustás O Héideáin (1991).

Other Writers

Many other writers also added to the growing corpus of works on the Claddagh. Not all, of course, can be included here, but note should be taken of two authors mentioned by Patrick Diskin in his chapter, 'Galway's Literary Associations' in *Town & Gown 1484-1984*. The first of these was Julius Rodenberg, who in his *The Island of Saints* (1861) described the charm of the younger women at the fish market but older ones failed to impress him:

> *"The old fisher-wives, on the other hand, who sat near the casks and smoked damp tobacco in short clay pipes, had something witch-like and menacing about them"*.

The second was Nicolette Devas who in her *Two Flamboyant Fathers* (1938) noted the strength of character of the Claddagh people:

> *"In the isolation of their closed community they seemed to be a much stronger people than those outside the Claddagh"*.

A writer who contradicted the notion that the Claddagh people did not delve too deeply into politics was James Berry who in his *Tales of the West of Ireland* captured the stirring time of an electon between a French and a Martin. The Claddagh people sided with the French camp but to the native mind this was not enough. We then had the rather strange spectacle of the women of the village arming themselves with skibs filled with offal from gutted fish for use against the Martin supporters. Success seemed to be theirs until big Anna Connolly came along and cast their vile missiles back at them resulting in their retreat.

Writers on the Demise of the Claddagh

Towards the end of the Old Claddagh, many writers commented on its demise. Gordon Cooper and Ernest Welsman in *Your Holiday in Ireland* (1948) comments:

> *"The few thatched cottages, all that now remain of a much larger community, are in a huddled group without streets or plan of any kind and they make a curious feature of the place; but it is a curiosity rather than charm"*.

Michael Floyd in his book, *The Face of Ireland,* continues the theme:

> *"..... anyone who knows Galway only from the 'picturesque' views of its Claddagh, or old fishing quarter of thatched and white-washed cottages and cobbled ways, knows Galway not at all. The Claddagh has of recent years been largely demolished to make way for concrete roads and a mushroom-growth of doubtless sound, sanitary, but by no means beautiful new dwelling; in a few years' time, at the present rate, hardly one of the old houses will remain".*

Writing about the Claddagh Swannery

Surprisingly, the famous swannery at the Claddagh is a comparatively new phenomenon According to Tony Whilde in his booklet, *Galway Bay Ecotour* (1986) the swan flock at the Claddagh can build up from a low in December to a pre-moulting peak of up to 300 in early August. Yet, it is only in recent times that the flock has grown to such proportions and such an attraction in the Corrib estuary. Taking a lead from the late Tom Lydon of the Claddagh, who was one of the first to regularly feed the swans, many people, both local and stranger, delight in offering food to these magnificent birds. The very act of doing so has now become a tourist attraction in its own right.

In years gone by, the Claddagh fishermen looked on the swan as a very special bird as Chris Flaherty (who left the Claddagh as a fourteen year old in 1948 and eventually became a policeman in Preston) explains in a letter (14th October, 1988) to the author:

> *"A fisherman once caught me throwing a stone at a swan in the Claddagh Basin. He took me to one side and told me never to do a thing like that again. He then explained, and I quote, 'Do you know who those swans are? Well I'll tell you. They are the souls of your ancestors. When the old fishermen died, their souls left their bodies, took the form of swans and returned to the basin to watch over the boats'. In view of this please tell the children of the Claddagh not to throw stones at the swans".*

This incident inspired the author to write a short story entitled "The Swan" which was published in the Christmas edition of the *City Tribune* in December, 1992.

Maisie Herring in her book, *The Young Traveller in Ireland* (1951) also alluded to the swans:

> *"..... Galway was looking stately in fresh Autumn sunshine when they first saw the white-crested blue water of the Corrib and started to count the swans making dignified progress over the boisterous water.....".*

As well, Stephen Rynne mentioned them in his book *All Ireland* (1956):

> *"..... The Corrib races on, a mixture of black ink and diluted pitch, even its crests are dingy and grubby. But the swans are snowy white further down where the excited river is calmed by the harbour-locked sea".*

Writing about the Claddagh Geese

Rather surprisingly also, very little has been written about the Claddagh geese. To outsiders, they were best viewed from afar, however, because they did not take too kindly to strangers. Sr. Ada of the Poor Clare Monastery of Bracken Lane, Southampton, in her youth was one

such visitor and has one abiding memory of the village, which she mentions in a letter to the author:

"Well I remember being chased by the geese at Claddagh!!"

The geese, who delighted in continually sampling the swampy areas of the 'Big Grass', were an obedient lot, however, and always came when called by their individual owners. Nevertheless, the village children were looked on as enemies by these feathered inhabitants of the Old Claddagh, as Mico soon found out to his cost at the very start of Walter Macken's *Rain on the Wind*. The old village is gone now, and the cackle of geese is only heard at Christmas beneath the shadow of the ancient Church of St. Nicholas across the Quay Stream.

The Claddagh in Song and Ballad

As one may well imagine, many poets and balladeers have dipped their pens in the charms of the Claddagh of long ago and many delightful pieces have been composed as a result. One of the most popular, 'The Old Claddagh Ring' has already appeared in these pages and is sung where ever Galwegians gather throughout the world. Another old favourite, of course, is that beautiful 'Here's a Toast to you Claddagh" whose words, of course, reflect the essence of what was the Old Claddagh:

If I were in Claddagh I would stand on the pier,
It's there I'd see fishermen mending their gear.
I would roam on forever where the whites waves roll still,
Here's a toast to you Claddagh at the foot of Fairhill.

They had many fine hurlers but now they're all gone,
May their names live forever like the great Fr. Tom.
In their green and black jerseys I remember them still
Here's a toast to you Claddagh at the foot of Fairhill.

I can see white-robed clergy out blessing the bay.
I can see the old fishermen, kneeling to pray.
May their homes be peaceful, by God's holy will
Here's a toast to you Claddagh at the foot of Fairhill.

And now to conclude here's good luck to you all,
On land or on sea or where're you call.
May your homes be peaceful by God's holy will.
Here's a toast to you Claddagh at the foot of Fairhill.

Not far behind in popularity also, is that beautiful song, "It's Heaven Around Galway Bay" especially when sung with so much feeling by Molly Browne or the late Ned Joyce.

Another favourite is the 'New Galway Bay' composed by Arthur Colahan and sung by Bing Crosby whose first lines have made the Claddagh famous:

And it may be some day I'll go back to Ireland,
If it's only at the closing of the day,
Just to see again the moon rise over Claddagh,
And watch the sun go down on Galway Bay.

More popular to older Galwegians, however, is 'The Old Galway Bay' by Francis A. Fahy of Kinvara:

Tis far away I am today, from scenes I roamed a boy
But long ago the hour I know, I first saw Illinois,
No time nor tide nor waters wide, can wean my heart away,
Forever true I'll fly to you, my own dear Galway Bay.

O! grey and bleak, by shores and creek, those rugged rocks abound,
But sweet and green the grass between, as grows on Irish ground.
So friendship fond, all wealth beyond, and love that lives always,
Bless each poor home beside your foam, my dear old Galway Bay.

The blessing of a poor old man be with you night and day,
The blessings of a lonely man, whose heart will soon be clay,
Now all I ask from God upon my dying day,
Is my soul to soar forever more, above you Galway Bay.

Other major songs which recall the past with Galway connotations include 'The Galway Shawl' and 'The Town of Galway'. All refer to a time when the sheer joy of singing was reflected in the natural abilities of the singer unburdened by the dictates of stereophonic or amplification sounds. Thus it is a pleasure to hear the likes of 'Sonny' Molly, Patricia Lillis, the late Gerry Glynn, Michael Hannon, John Tierney, Molly Browne, Hugh Keleghan, Paddy Naughton, Tess Tiernan, the late John Bailey and Ned Joyce, to mention just a few Galwegians who know how to deal correctly with the moon rising over Claddagh or the sun going down on Galway Bay.

In fact, one of the finest singers of the Claddagh songs is Patricia O'Gorman nee Carrick, formerly of Claddagh Place, whose rendering of 'Here's a Toast to you Claddagh' at the funeral Mass on the 28th July, 1993, of the late King Ladneen Curran moistened many an eye in the congregation. Patricia, of course, is no stranger to singing in public, being one of the top finalists in the 'Deep in my Heart' singing contest, which took place in the Town Hall as one of the main events of the Race Week Festival of 1955.

As well as these well-known songs, other pieces fall into the realm of both song/hymn and poetry. One of these was titled 'Hymn of the Claddagh Fisherman' and was published anonymously in the 17th November, 1875 issue of the *Galway Vindicator:*

God and St. Brendan speed us well.
The sun rolls high and the wild waves swell,
The sun has set and the night comes down.
The skies are dark with an angry frown.
The shrieking winds through the darkness wail,
Rent and shivered are mast and sail;

Of rock and shoal we may well take heed,
God and St. Brendan be our speed.

The lights grow dim in the Claddagh Bay.
Their gleam is lost in the blinding spray;
But mothers sit in the silence there.
And waft to Heaven the fervent prayer
That their sleeping babes may wake to find
Their fathers safe from storm and wind.
'Tis for us they pray, and their beads they tell;
God and St. Brendan speed us well.

The foam flakes drive through the lurid air,
Fierce is the lightning ruddy glare,
Danger and wrath are upon the sea,
But our trust and strength are, O God! in Thee.
Though high the billows may roll and rock,
Thy breath can the storm and tempest mock;
Though loud the winds and the breakers roar
Thy hand can guide to the friendly shore.

Grant us, O! lord, if it be Thy will,
The storm to brave and our nets to fill,
That the rising sun at morn may see
Us safe and well where our loved ones be.
For them with fervor and love we toil,
Sweet is the labour and fair the spoil,
Bright is our welcome at early dawn,
May God and St. Brendan speed us on!

These, then, are some of the main ballads or hymns written mainly about the Claddagh area, and with the 'The Claddagh Boatman', composed by Jeremiah J. Dowling, reflect in word and song the life and emotions of the Claddagh long since gone.

The Claddagh in Poetry

The Old Claddagh has also inspired poets to weave their words with care and feeling about the old boats, the thatched houses and the people themselves. Perhaps, one of the best known poems is, *The Last Galway Hooker,* by Richard Murphy, who bought the last remaining Claddagh Hooker, *Truelight,* from Martin Oliver in 1959.

In more recent times, Moya Cannon's 'Turf Boats' in the *Connacht Tribune* contained some thought provoking lines:

Hollow boats at the Claddagh,
hearts that beat in you
lie in granite-walled graveyards
from Leitirmullen to Barna,
finished with hardship,

the unloading of cargo,
the moody Atlantic
that entered the marrow,
and bright days off Ceann Boirne,
when wind struck the brown sails
and Ithica was Carna.

Another recent work, written by Cuthbert M. Nolan, better known as Brother Cuthbert, a well-known Patrician Brother educator for many years in Galway, is entitled *'Where is the Land? .....A Fantasy'*. It is described as a trip into the realm of fantasy prompted by the Great Snow of 1947 in Galway.

1. *The snow lay deep upon the ground ... Twelve inches did it stand,*
   And all the people wandering round Cried: "Where, oh! where's the land?"
2. *To all the wondering Western gaze this snowy sight was grand,*
   But through their mingled cries of praise They asked: "Where is the land?"
3. *The fishermen of Claddagh town with stumpy pipes in hand*
   Looked all amazed and awful cold, And cried: "Where is the land?"
4. *They went upon a fishing trip And said the snow was grand;*
   But when they homeward came adip They couldn't find the land!!!
5. *And all the fish lay back and laughed At all the crews had planned;*
   And all the men both fore and aft Were looking for the strand.
6. *The wondering crowds stood on the beach — They made a motley band —*
   And at his eager best was each To find where was the land.
7. *They blamed the snow — the pure white snow — Which first was mighty grand —*
   In merry madness it did throw, And yelled: "Where is the land?"
8. *The skies all echoed with the shouts Of crews and crowds when lo!!!*
   The sun burst red from out the clouds And settled in the snow.
9. *The frost, the air and snow did grip: Homeward the crowds did go.*
   They left the sad crews in each ship, And Murmured through the snow.
10. *They left the beach and left the boats To fate's uncertain hand:*
    In one last effort cleared their throats, And cried "Oh where's the land?"
11. *The day turned night on land and sea. The crews sailed into sand*
    And everywhere the land should be They cried, "Where is the land?"
12. *Each one got home quite safe that night ... The fish swam off the strand ...*
    While chilly seas were their delight They thought not of the land.
13. *The frost gripped all the snow in ice; Yet all did still demand,*
    And sought to know at any price The features of the land.

EPILOGUE

THE WEARISOME QUESTION PLIED UP AND PLIED DOWN
THE ANSWER THEY DID NOT KNOW
TILL THE MOCKING GREY CLOUDS OF THE HEAV'NS DID OPE...
THEN THEY CRIED; "OH WHERE'S THE SNOW?" ..

The Old Claddagh on Canvas

The Old Claddagh, with its white-washed walls, golden thatch and colourful clothing of its inhabitants, was a ready-made canvas for countless artists and book illustrators. Down at 'The Bankeen' and the other grey-stoned piers and quays of the harbour, five-deep rows of the dark, broad-bellied sailing boats bobbed together with the changing tides and presented quite a challenge to both colour and pen and ink devotees. Always in the background, lay Long Walk with its row of colourful buildings providing ideal backdrops to both paintings and etchings. In between lay the Quay Stream in all its dark moods of spate and drought, forever demanding movement on the canvas. The swans, of course, were blobs of living white, adding contrast and vitality to the familiar scene as the Corrib busily gargled its waters towards the waiting sea.

Walter Osborne, Augustus John, Harry Kernoff and Charles Lamb were some of the famous names who came to pay their special homage to the living landscape of the Old Claddagh. In later times, when only memories of the former village survived in the mind of the older generation, John Mulhern, Kenneth Webb, Derek Biddulph and many others have sought to breathe fresh life into those mental images and capture in their different styles the magic that was the Claddagh.

In recent times, paintings of the Old Claddagh have made the headlines, such as the Harry Kernoff work entitled "The Old Claddagh, Galway" which was sold at Woodwards Auction in Cork in 1990. A year earlier, an 1929 original water colour of the Old Claddagh by the artist, James W. Carey, was discovered accidently in Fr. Griffin Road Vocational School and now hangs proudly in the principal's office there.

Perhaps, one of the finest collections of Claddagh art was presented in *The Paintings of the Claddagh 1922* Exhibition by Charles Lamb in the Bank of Ireland, 19 Eyre Square in March 1990. The vivid hue of the red petticoats of the women and the harsh rawness of the village were still evident in these vibrant canvases, keeping alive the very essence of a village lost to time.

The Old Claddagh in Photographs

The clicking of the camera lens captures a moment of history. The scene is frozen in that instance of time and preserves a picture of the past as it was and not as pen or paint would purport it to be. Thus, the value of old prints cannot be underestimated and in the context of the Old Claddagh village, are priceless. Some magnificent views of the village form part of the great Lawrence Collection, a number of which appear in this publication.

They show the reality of life in the village and its far from easy lifestyles, while individual prints from private collections often eaves-drop on a net-mending session on the quays or the Blessing of the Bay. Maurice Semple in his recent works includes many photographs of the Old Claddagh and its people. Perhaps, some of the finest prints of the village appear in a French publication entitled *Irlande 1913* and consist of a set of very early colour photographs, some of which show scenes from the Claddagh in 1913.

Today, despite the absence of the thatched houses, the art of photographing the Claddagh continues unabated. The old boats are still as picturesque as ever and the 'Claddaghs' of

today still lean across their version of the 'lazy wall'. The famous swans are always eager for that photo session and Nimmo's Pier is an ideal stage from which to view the Gleóiteogs under sail. Scenes from here often feature in photographic exhibitions and local amateur photographers such as Jackie Duggan know the value of that special Claddagh moment of time. One such magical moment is captured on the back cover of *Galway ... Heart of the West* (1991) by Brendan Lawlor in his evening study of the Quay Stream as the rising moon sends a shimmering golden beam across the waters to the ever-present swans.

Claddagh Writings by Local Claddagh Man

For many years now, Patrick Cooke, who was born beside the 'Big Grass' in the Old Claddagh, has written extensively on his home place as *City Tribune* correspondent for the area and in letters to the local press. In his efforts, he has recorded aspects of the Old Claddagh which might have been lost forever. Typical of such valued work include his reminiscences on 'Christmas in the Old Claddagh':

> *"Christmas was a happy time in Claddagh long ago, and how we loved it and playing in the snow. I don't think that Christmas was celebrated in any other part of God's green earth like it was in the Old Claddagh.*
>
> *A week beforehand all the delph would be taken off the dresser and washed and polished until every article shone like silver. Next the holly would be put up behind the pictures and the mottoes on the wall with the inscriptions 'God Bless Our Home', 'The Compliments of the Season', 'What is Home Without a Mother', 'Welcome to All Who Enter', 'Peace on Earth to Men of Good Will. And Christmas would not be Christmas without the traditional raisin cake, and coming nearer the festival the goose would be killed and plucked, and the feathers saved for stuffing pillows, and as well as that some of his fat would be put in a jar to help in curing the pains and aches of the following year.*
>
> *Christmas Day began with six o'clock Mass and visiting the Crib. In those days there was no television or wireless, no gas or electric oven for cooking. It all had to be done on a turf fire. And then of course we had Small Christmas on the Twelfth Day, or Nodlaig Beag, as the old people used to call it, when twelve candles were lit and put on the inside of the windows and the snow glistening on the thatched roofs. No Christmas card was ever as beautiful.*
>
> *But we must not forget St. Stephen's Day when the lads of the village with their cages all dressed up would visit all the houses, singing:*
>
> *'The Wren, the wren, the king of all birds,*
> *St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze,*
> *Although he's small his family was great,*
> *So rise up good people and give us a treat.*
> *But if the treat be of the small,*
> *It won't go down with boys at all.*
> *So up with kettle and down with the pan*
> *And give us the price of an ould half can!'."*

Among many of his weekly contributions on events in the Claddagh, the following shows Paddy Cooke's eagerness to remind his readers of the traditional values of the old village:

> *"Last Sunday was May Day and seeing the May Bush on some doors in the Claddagh, recalled to mind days now past when every house in the village would have the May Bush on its doors. And as well as that there would be a procession around the grounds of the Dominican Church every Sunday evening in honour of Our Lady with the marchers singing that beautiful hymn, 'O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May".*

Last Thoughts on the Old Claddagh

The Old Claddagh is gone now and with it a way of life, which touched a mysterious past. As the old homes vanished, the pool of history finally clouded over, filled with the rubble of time. Now, only faltering memories and fading papers cling to an era when geese ruled the *garraí* and the smell of fish and tar perfumed the sea air.

It was a strange time, of course, when terraced houses were built back to front beside each other along the Rope Walk, when the purpose of streets still escaped the native mind. It was a time when the placing of a person's chair in an empty house meant taking over that deserted kingdom, as strong a symbol, surely, as the inauguration of an ancient Celtic chieftain on his seat of stone. It was a time when the humble cat, long a creature of superstition, was sacrificed beneath an altar of beach sand to induce that special sea god to send favourable winds.

They were difficult times, also, for fish on the line meant food on the table in more ways than one. However, as Mairtin 'Mate' Lydon said in Jack Cunningham's book, *Galway's Own*:

> *"The times were rough but we were able for them".*

Yet, one has the feeling that there were happy periods in the Old Claddagh also, for many strangers came and marvelled at a people content in their ancient ways. Their pleasures were simple ones and none more human than the joy of conversation. Mary Banim notes this aspect also:

> *"Many a happy hour has been spent talking with the fishermens' children on the Claddagh pier and enjoying the lovely sunshine, watching it, as it moved round to the west, light up, as if with gold the broad, shining bay; the Clare Mountains, now bluish grey, now pale violet, now covered with the golden mist Turner loved to paint....".*

As evenings fell, and the days chores were over, the adults also immersed themselves in conversation, the women gathering themselves around the hearth, while, as Fr. Leo R. Ward observes:

> *"In the evening, the Claddagh men stand at the doors and talk. They say they hate to go to bed and the sun still an hour in the sky".*

The murmur of voices was everywhere as dusk fell across the darkening quays and *garraí.* By then, the geese were asleep, as long, black cats stirred themselves for the night's work. H. V. Morton tells about the little islands of conversation as darkness descended:

> *" At night the Claddagh is most beautiful. There are no street lamps. You find your way through the maze of houses by the light that falls through windows and open doors. The path of earth has been beaten hard by the feet of generations going back to the Norman conquest of Ireland. The limewashed houses with the peat reek coming from their chimneys shine in the half light. The children who in daylight play on the squares of beaten earth and before the cabin doors have been put to bed. It is quiet and watchful and full of the chirping of crickets. Figures of men stand in little groups in the dusk talking in the Gaelic. Sometimes they pause and cry out softly:*
>
> *'Goot night."*

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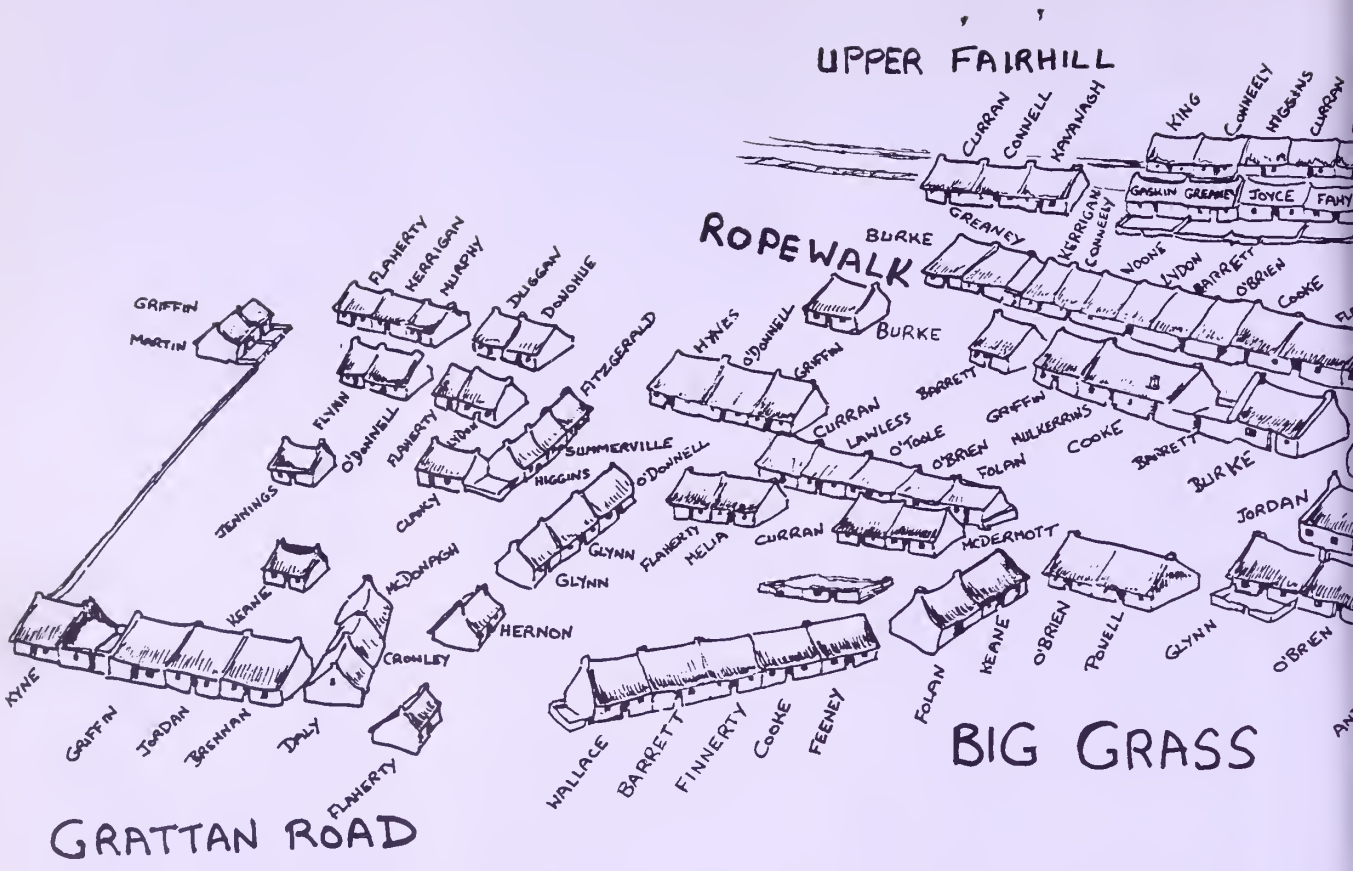
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CURRAN
CONNELL
KAVANAGH
KING
CONNEELY
HIGGINS
CURRAN
GASKIN
GREENEY
JOYCE
FAHY
ROPEWALK
BURKE
GREANEY
KERRIGAN
CONNEELY
NOONE
LYDON
BARRETT
O'BRIEN
COOKE
BURKE
FLAHERTY
KERRIGAN
MURPHY
DUGGAN
DONOHUE
GRIFFIN
MARTIN
FLYNN
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JENNINGS
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GLYNN
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HERNON
CROWLEY
KYNE
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JORDAN
BRENNAN
DALY
FLAHERTY
FOLAN
KEANE
O'BRIEN
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BARRETT
FINNERTY
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BIG GRASS
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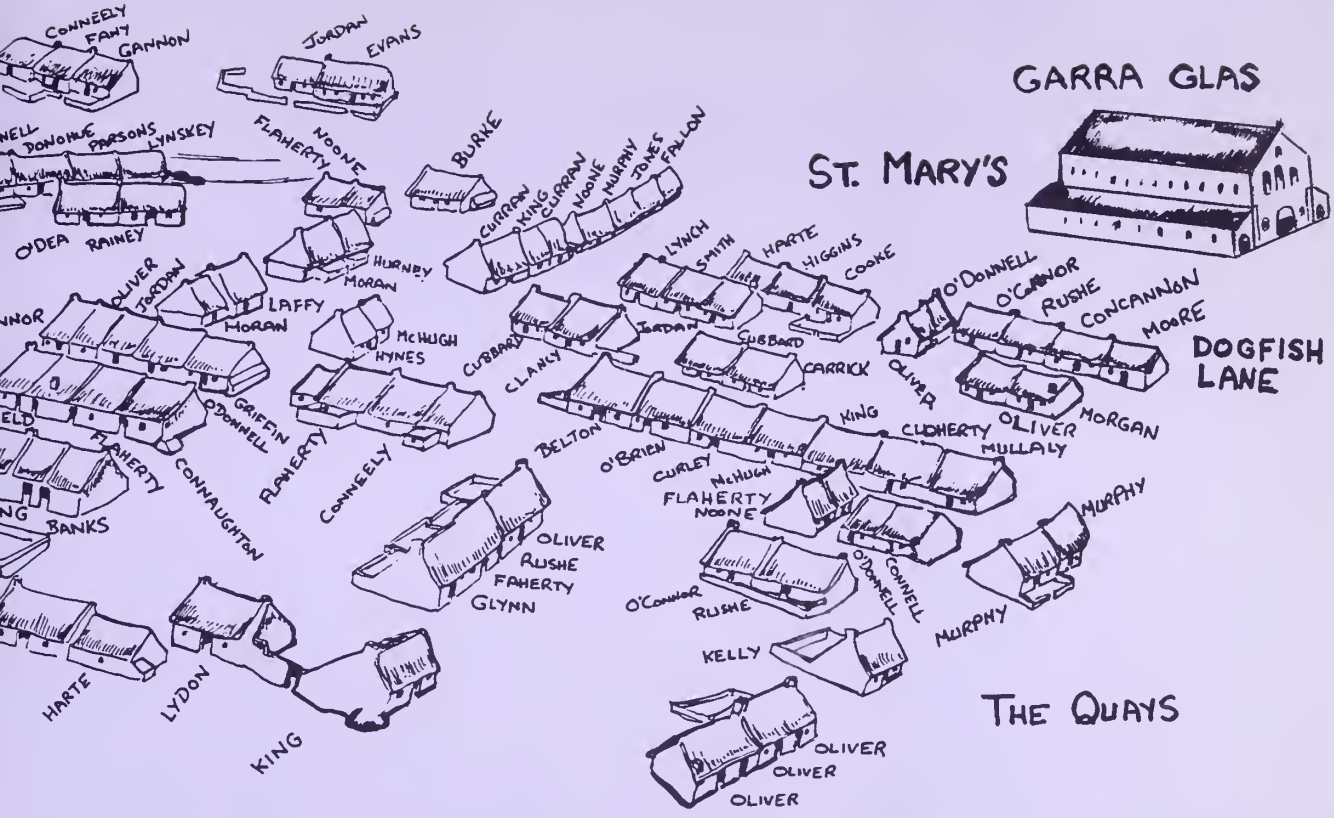
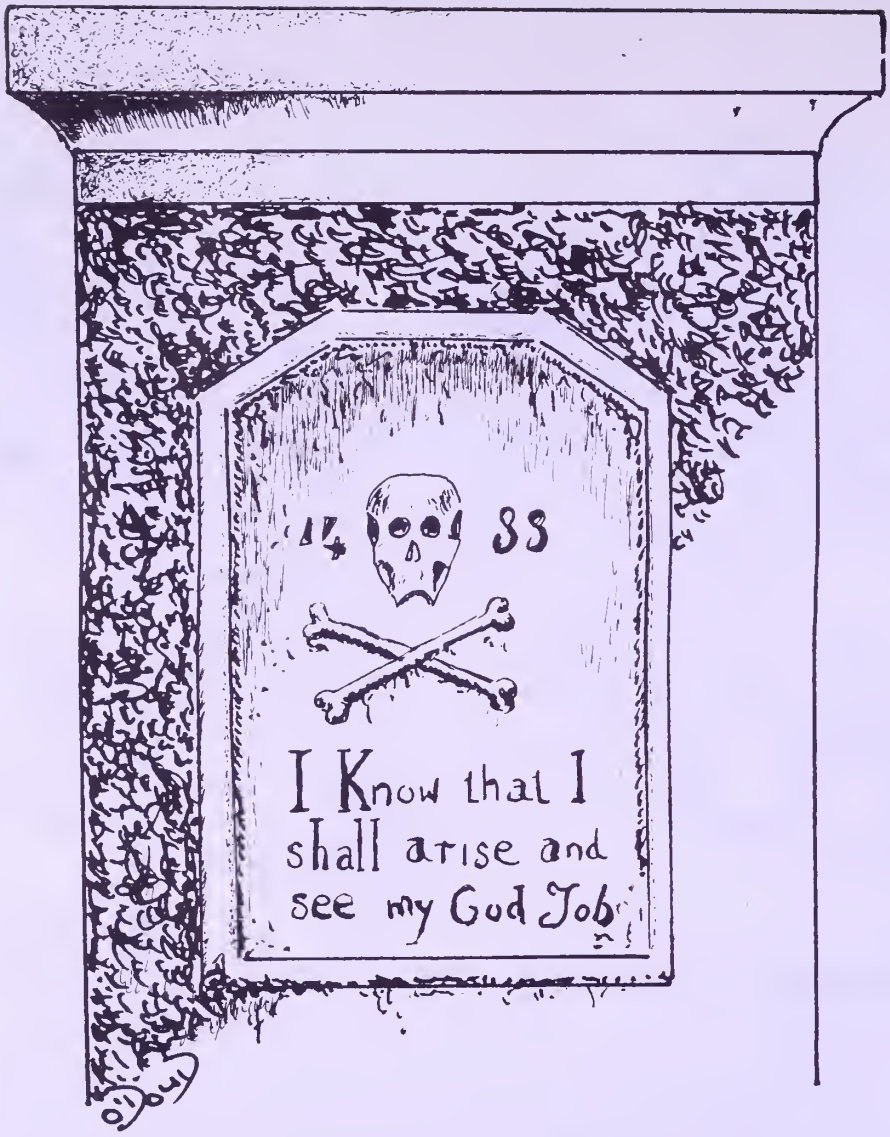


The Claddagh area south west of Dominican Church based on the 1928 aerial photograph. (From "Vanishing Galway").



Entrance to Dominican Churchyard in the Claddagh. (From "Old & New Galway").

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